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Edited by

Monica Evans

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Concepts, Cultures and Communications

Edited by

Monica Evans

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Introduction

Monica Evans

The chapters in this volume reflect the discussions that occurred during the 2nd Global Conference on *Videogame Cultures and the Future of Interactive Entertainment*, held as part of Cyber Hub activity within the ID.net Critical Issues research hub at Mansfield College, Oxford, United Kingdom in July 2010. This edited collection of chapters provides a snapshot of the inquires, discussions, and conclusions drawn at this conference.

Research in game studies remains, as always, highly interdisciplinary in nature. The conference represented a meeting-of-the-minds from experts in multiple fields, including economics, philosophy, psychology, theology, literature, film studies, and new media studies, as well as game studies, design, and development.

Throughout the conference, four primary topics prevailed and were developed among the chapters and discussions. The refinement of game studies as a field was among the most prevalent, both through presentation of new frameworks and models for understanding and through calls for change of the current prevailing theories. The relationship between game studies and other fields, in particular literature, film, and media studies, was a major part of the continuing narratology-ludology debate, and more than one proposed framework attempted to solve this ongoing dilemma, often by modifying or adapting models from related fields. Attendees also called for an expansion of the field of game studies in multiple areas, including game development, game production and economics, social media gaming, table-top gaming, and live-action and collaborative role-play. Whether digital games were the correct focus of game studies or a dominant subset of analog or social games was discussed at length.

Videogame culture was explored in three main areas: as evolving among social or sub-groups of individuals, as related to the constructed identity of the individual, and as an effect on national or global cultural groups. Discussions of player-avatar relationships, identity creation and presentation, and role-play performance were extensive, and often were tied to a specific game or game genre. One common thread between player identity discussions was the question of involvement: how much of a character is the player's self, how much the player's performance, and what level of control does the player have over that boundary? Subcultures of players were discussed in relation to online or MMORPG game types, transmedia game narratives, and the rapidly growing social gaming genre - although defining the 'social game', as well as the exact nature and depth of a given player's social investment, was the subject of spirited debate. Attendees also noted that the base culture and ethnicity of a game's development team significantly affected the meaning and intent of the game experience, particularly when a game that critically engaged with one culture was the product of another.

Controversial content and ethics was once again a prevailing theme of many conversations. Questions of violence, aggression, pornography, and addiction were this time centred on the paired issues of player engagement and developer intent. Explorations of the human desire to test boundaries and taboos in game spaces were balanced by discussions of whether games could in fact be good for the soul, as well as by a new study on aggression that found graphically violent games to be less affecting than driving and racing games. Also addressed were issues of ethnicity, political message construction, social imbalance, and bio-ethics, particularly as they appeared in well-known, culturally-significant games. The core issue produced from these discussions was the creation of meaningful or significant play, and the nature of the boundaries or definitions one must place on the gamespace for meaning to be constructed by the player. Neither the technical, aesthetic, or interactive limits of games were found to obstruct the creation of meaningful experiences; instead, the kinds of experiences that could be considered meaningful within games varied almost by individual.

The conference ended with a discussion of the place of serious games, focused in large part on education. Games and virtual environments were agreed to have great potential as educational tools, simulation-based trainers, spaces for knowledge construction, and even moral or ethical experimentation, but achieving that potential is admittedly difficult. Both new frameworks for educational game development and case-studies of games or new research in progress were presented, and two panels discussed potential research approaches to these issues in-depth. While educators and game scholars

To reflect the primary topics of the conference discussed above, the 16 chapters of the book have been organized into 4 parts:

Part I: Theories and Concepts of Gaming
Part II: Videogame Cultures
Part III: Ethics, Controversy, and Ideology
Part IV: Serious Games and Virtual Worlds

The first part of the book presents five chapters focused on new theoretical frameworks for defining and discussing games.

Adam W. Ruch begins the section with his chapter ‘Videogame Interface: Artefacts and Tropes’, in which he explores the ‘thickness of metaphor’ of contemporary videogames, primarily examining Nintendo’s Mario character and series of games as an example. He argues that describing a game as a balance of its interactive ‘gameness’ and its fictional ‘metaphor’ provides a more stable framework for analysis. While many games focus on realism or simulation, Ruch states that certain standard tropes of games, such as health bars or experience points, are necessary abstractions that, like cuts in a film or chapter breaks in a novel, enhance rather than detract from the fictional game experience. Ruch

concludes that interface abstractions will continue to be necessary for both functionality and accessibility of future games.

Jaakko Stenros and *Annika Waern*, in their chapter 'Games as Activity: Correcting the Digital Fallacy,' state that digital games, rather than the main focus of game studies, should be considered a special case, and that game scholars' current concerns with structure and system are not as central to the field as the study of player activity and experience. Stenros and Waern argue that a more useful approach is to examine games as both consciously structured and enacted experiences. They suggest that a new framework for game studies might begin with 'openness' as a design principle, carefully balanced with the more traditional design of games as rules and structures, and with constant consideration of game-as-played activity.

Enrico Gandolfi's chapter, 'The Videoludic Pleasure: Between Isotopies and Revolutions,' offers a new perspective on game analysis from the domain of semiotics. His description of the medium of games as 'videoludic' balances multiple definitions of 'game' with an aesthetic, interactive interface that allow for diverse, widespread audiences to experience multiple narrative spaces. Gandolfi divides the pleasure of games into four main parts: immersion, emersion, wonder, and control, and argues that through these means of engagement games service the potential of humanity, and create the 'human medium for excellence.'

Tobias Unterhuber attempts to solve the continuing narratology-ludology debate through what he calls the Gamemaster approach. In 'The Gamemaster-Approach to Game Studies,' Unterhuber puts forth two main ideas: that the core assumptions of table-top role-playing games hold true for all video game genres; and that the Gamemaster concept of role-playing games can be effectively applied to all video games. This approach, he argues, allows for an integration of both ludological and narratological aspects of games. Unterhuber discusses the Gamemaster figure as world creator, simultaneously the narrator of an experience, referee for that experience, and master of the mechanics and systems that allow the game world to come into being. He concludes that this approach may allow for new research in literary studies as well, particularly as applied to the concept of the narrator in fiction.

Finally, *Randy Nichols* calls for an expansion of the field of game studies by presenting an examination of the production methods behind the digital game industry. His chapter, 'Before Play, Production: Contributions of Political Economy to the Field of Game Studies,' focuses on political economic questions that have heretofore been largely overlooked by game studies. Nichols points out that the software, often the primary focus of game scholars, is only one of many commodities produced in the industry; and that questions of labour, time, and power relations abound. Nichols concludes that an expansion of the field is crucial, and that further research is necessary to understand games' broader impact on societies and environments.

The second part of the book presents four chapters that explore aspects of player cultures as centred on individual games and genres.

The second part begins with *Marlin Bates IV*'s chapter 'Five Years of ur-Real Identity: A Rhetorical Examination of the History of *World of Warcraft*,' in which he performs a close reading of the websites, both official and fan-created, of the popular MMORPG. Bates argues that the clearest rhetorical change in the game is represented by achievements, and that the introduction of this system to the game world has significantly affected the ways in which players construct identity. He notes three ways in which players utilize achievements in identity construction – representation of their in-game work, proof of in-game skill, and as away to connect their game identity to their 'ur-real' identity – and concludes that further research in identity construction must include not only the game and the players, but the external spaces, such as websites, that also make up part of the gamespace.

Tim Christopher's chapter 'Sys-Op is Dead: Community Evolution and Online Games,' traces the evolution of game-specific sub-cultures and social groups through an in-depth look at the changing role of the system operator. Christopher notes that the technical role of the sys-op, to host and maintain a multi-player gamespace, has been gradually overtaken by game companies and publishers, which has a homogenizing effect on the kinds of player communities that flourish around particular online game types. He concludes with the concern that the first sub-group of players to 'claim' a new game will eventually become the only sub-group in that community, and that gamers, already adept at self-segregation, may themselves become a barrier to entry for new players in multiple game genres.

Cathie LeBlanc returns to identity formation but shifts the focus to social and casual gamer culture in her chapter, 'Social Media Games and the Performance of Self.' Looking primarily at the play of adults, LeBlanc examines popular games played on FaceBook and MySpace through the lenses of uses and gratification theory and impression management. She posits that social media games allow players to present a detailed impression of themselves to others, and that this performance of identity fills a need for both personal relationship and personal identity construction, more than simply entertainment or diversion. LeBlanc concludes that these aspects of social media games may be one reason that they appeal so strongly to non-traditional game-playing groups, particularly middle-aged women.

Aaron Bennett concludes the section with his chapter, 'We All Live in a Pokémon World,' in which he draws comparisons between the Pokémon phenomenon, the culture of Pokémon players, Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, utilitarianism, and principles of free market economies. Bennett concludes that friendship, social interaction, and the drive to succeed are not only core to the narrative and design of Pokémon, but that they are crucial elements to its success, and that the underlying purpose of the franchise is to encourage its young fans to adopt these philosophical tenets in everyday life. The chapter ends with an open

'thank you' to Satoshi Tajiri, the creator of Pokémon, for bringing the franchise into the world.

The third part of the book explores some of the more controversial aspects of games.

Charlene Burns begins this section by suggesting that video games can potentially construe a sacred space. In her chapter, 'Ludological & Theological Ethics: Could Games be Good for the Soul?' she examines gameplay from the standpoint of theological rather than philosophical ethics. Arguing against the simplistic reactionary stance on games held by many religiously affiliated groups, Burns instead focuses on games as narrative experience, and relates that experience and play to the psychological concept of 'doubling.' Players' constant need to 'double' in games, she argues, makes them more conscious of the act and therefore less susceptible to destructive forms of 'doubling' in real life. Burns concludes with a discussion of theological ethics as improvisational acting, and argues that virtual habits developed through this sort of improvisation in games may help players to become positive moral agents in life.

Ewan Kirkland's chapter 'Racial Whiteness in *Silent Hill*' builds on the work of film scholar Richard Dyer to present the popular Konami series of games as continually reflecting on and constructing concepts of whiteness. Kirkland notes that the discourse of white ethnicity is pervasive, particularly given the series' aesthetic focus on mist, light, static or 'white noise', and images of death. Kirkland further argues that racial whiteness is inherent not only in the Caucasian characters, but in the goals, objectives, and design of the games, as well as the recurring white narrative themes of repression, secrecy, guilt, and the seemingly idyllic small town masking horrific primeval forces (a hallmark of the series). Kirkland notes that the Japanese authorship of the games makes a straightforward reading of Silent Hill problematic, but maintains that the games are 'conspicuously American texts,' and may represent a critical engagement with racial whiteness from the standpoint of a culture in which whiteness has not been fundamentally normalized.

Steven Malliet, with *Tom Thysen* and *Karolien Poels*, presents an examination of two contemporary games featuring explicit political messages. Their chapter, 'Digital Game Rhetorics: An Investigation of Political Content in *America's Army* and *Grand Theft Auto IV*,' begins with a pair of research questions concerning the developers' intended and reflected intent, and a subset of players' response to the presented political content. The following study examined a sample of players, separated by their level of political engagement and interest, through a series of in-depth interviews conducted after playing either *Grand Theft Auto IV* or *America's Army*. Malliet's results indicate that each game utilizes a different kind of political message construction. He posits that, for many players, enjoyment outweighs moral or political content in games, and that different play styles may account for differences in political content awareness.

The fourth part of the book explores the creation of meaningful experiences in serious games and virtual worlds.

Sarah O'Brien examines performative aspects of play in her chapter, 'Serious Play: Performance, Death, and Theatricality in Second Life.' O'Brien suggests that engaging in theatrical play, which requires an audience (as opposed to immersive play, which does not) opens virtual spaces like Second Life to affective, emotional, and ultimately revealing forms of interaction. O'Brien examines how three art works - Second Front's 'Martyr Sauce', Gazira Babeli's 'iGods', and Jessica Curry and Dan Pinchbeck's 'The Second Death of Caspar Helendale' – create serious play for viewers, and how through works like these participants may begin to create social, emotional, and reflective meaning for themselves in virtual spaces.

In his chapter 'Gamespace as Knowledge Space,' *Daniel Riha* takes a diagrammatic approach to the exploration of 3D virtual environments. He defines these environments as potential as knowledge spaces in which players or learners can construct meaning. Building on previous work in 3D navigation of virtual spaces, Riha argues that the user's ability to reconfigure existing elements in the space has the highest potential for analysis and knowledge construction, and that this aspect of the medium significantly informs the ways in which users construct meaning through action. Riha ends with the idea that users should be experiencing 'significant fun' in such spaces, and calls for further research in encoding and reconfiguring knowledge in 3D spaces for the purpose of cultural knowledge production.

Monica Evans examines the educational potential for games in her chapter 'Not-So-Serious Games: Digital Education through Serious Game Design.' Evans describes the 'magic bullet' problem – that games are too often seen by educators as a catch-all solution to institutional or pedagogical issues – and argues that successful educational games are those in which the learners' play experience is both engaging and appropriately matched to the interactive aspects of the educational content. Evans also notes that educational games which follow the best design principles of entertainment games are more likely to be successful. The chapter ends with a brief case study of one of Evans' current educational game projects, a game that assists with calculus instruction at the university level, and concludes with the hope that educational game developers will continue to experiment with the learning potential of digital games.

Lastly, *Harrison Gish*, in his chapter, 'Avatars in Stasis? Projections of the Self in Literature, Film, and Games,' presents a multi-pronged analysis of the avatar figure as represented in cinematic and textual media, as created by players in interactive media, and as digitally coded and created by game developers. Gish discusses how the cyberpunk and science fiction roots of videogame avatars provide a useful approach for analysis, one that becomes more useful as the technology and sophistication of game avatars increases through their history. Considering the avatar as balanced between the player interface and the coded

database allows for new forms of analysis, and ultimately to increased engagement of the user with virtual spaces. Gish concludes that new representations of the avatar are heavily influenced by the limitations of technology, perspective, and interaction extant in digital games and virtual worlds.

Part I:

Theories and Concepts of Gaming

Videogame Interface: Artefacts and Tropes

Adam W. Ruch

Abstract
This chapter highlights and discusses the function of several tropes and artefacts found within contemporary videogames. These tropes are analysed in their capacities to simultaneously distance the videogame from reality, but to make possible the playing of the game. This play is as opposed to the unmitigated experience of real life, as directed by an auteur of some sort. The 'thickness of metaphor' utilized by a game describes how far from pure code or mathematics the videogame's aesthetic exterior is. Of course all games are rooted in their code, but very few do not attempt to cloak this system in some kind of metaphor, from invading aliens to guitar notation. This axis, one among others, helps to describe the balance of a videogame's 'gameness' with its 'metaphor', premise or to borrow Juul's term, fiction. It is hoped that by developing such vocabulary and measurements, many games, past, contemporary and future may be usefully analysed in relatively stable terms. The Mario series of games will serve as an example, among others.

Key Words: Videogame, interface, realism, ontology, narrative, simulation, abstract, artefact, Mario.

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1. Axes of Measurement

Contemporary videogames are often measured by their 'realism' in comparison to real life, and against a logical set of rules that are imagined to be at play in the synthetic/fictional world. Gameworlds set in particular, established fictional universes are measured by the rules of those worlds, where they may or may not differ from our own world. As games move steadily towards greater sophistication in simulation of physics and society, many artefacts and abstract tropes remain behind to 'disrupt' the realism of the player's experience. It is precisely these abstractions and tropes that make these games playable, and make them games at all. Arguably, these kinds of abstractions remain in other media as well, something that videogames continue to share with narrative media. As argued below, total abandonment of artifice in favour of a resilient simulation of reality (or a synthetic reality) would seriously handicap the software's ability to function as a game or as a narrative.

This chapter will discuss the 'thickness of metaphor', that is, the degree to which abstract process have been integrated with a simulation of the (real or fictional) 'coherent' world.[1] For the most abstract theoretical 'game' that exists only in pure code, input keystrokes are not disguised and output is simply a

positive non-crash of the computer program. One step from this would be *Tetris*, the abstract fitting together of regular geometric shapes for no other reason than to gain points. The extreme opposite of this is a completely coherent explanation of every option and ability the player has to interact with the gameworld. This perfect simulation would be the ubiquitous 'holodeck' from the *Star Trek* series, and has obviously not been achieved. However, many games work steadily to explain the reasons for every action, reaction and relationship within a computerised system. The interface with that system is a problem to which we will return later.

When speaking of videogames and their aesthetic metaphor, one may be inclined to speak in terms of temporal progression, as early games appear more abstract than modern examples. This is not strictly true, as pure puzzle and abstract games are being made today. At times this discussion will describe the transformation, or perhaps, emergence of a new species, leaving the more abstract species to continue as before. A theoretical antecedent to the kind of abstract 'game' of the purest form would be the structure of rock, scissors, paper, but without the rock, the scissors or the paper. That is to say a game wherein the rule is that 1 beats 2, 2 beats 3, and 3 beats 1. This game could easily be played with the digits of a human hand, as the rock, scissors and paper are, but with an abstract, purely numerical content. The rock, scissors and paper represent metaphors for objects in the real world that could believably explain why 1 beats 2 beats 3 beats 1. Because there is no rational explanation for why solid lines disappear in *Tetris*, nor any indication where the blocks are coming from, the game remains at the extreme end of abstraction, a game of rules which we can call a puzzle. The farthest opposite end of this spectrum is indistinct, as the difference between game, narrative and simulation becomes increasingly hazy. Where precisely an object ceases to be a game and becomes a pure narrative is hard to exemplify, but the lack of any interactivity at all can serve as an measurable limit. Still, one can imagine that a film which requires the viewer to press a button once every five minutes would not be considered a 'game' despite its requirement for input. Neither would a completely coherent simulated world without objective or goal.

At the fulcrum of this vast range sits a unique franchise that has remained strikingly consistent throughout the last thirty years of game development: Nintendo's Mario.

From *Super Mario Bros.* on the Nintendo through to *Super Mario Galaxy* for the Wii (and subsequent titles being released as this study develops), this franchise has epitomised the videogame balanced between abstract puzzle challenge and virtual world. The world Mario inhabits is a strange place, but it is a place. We can actually point at it on screen, and conceive of walking through it, entering and exiting the Princess' castle, swimming in water and travelling through pipes. There is a there, there. Yet it only exists to present a puzzling challenge to the player. The world is totally senseless, it could not exist in a rational sense. The binding feature of the world is actually Mario, a physical avatar who can run, jump and stomp on

Goombas, rather than physics or quantum mechanics or divine purpose. Everything in the world, from the distance between platforms to the characteristics of Bowser himself can be traced back to Mario's potential ability to overcome them. Nothing exists in Mario's world that is not a puzzle for Mario to solve. The world is gameplay incarnate.

Understanding that the Mushroom Kingdom (where most of Mario's adventures take place) is not the real world is very important. This prevents us from being forced to justify why or how a raccoon tail can make the intrepid plumber fly, or where the bodies of dispatched Koopa-Troopas go. They are simply game rules, as are the rules of physics. In *Super Mario Galaxy*, the three dimensions are heavily utilised, and the gravity of the world is often the subject of the puzzle. Mario must traverse many three-dimensional, floating objects where he can run around the whole orb as it floats in space. Down can become up in a matter of seconds in this game, but one does not have to explain it. One can take this as an departure from Marie-Leure Ryan's virtual worlds that can be understood via the principle of minimal departure precisely because the world of Mario departs from ours so wildly as to render many of our assumptions about physics useless.[2]

Juul has explained why Mario has three lives by labelling his world 'incoherent.' His explanation functions well enough, though the label makes it seem something of lesser status than a coherent world.[3] There is something sublime in most of the Mario games, something that encourages us to abandon notions of coherence in favour of fun. The challenge and the triumph, these are all that matter in a Mario game. In its own terms, the game's world is quite coherent. It is, always, a puzzle. The fact that the gameworld is a different kind of world to our own does not make it internally inconsistent. The Mushroom Kingdom (or its outlying galaxy) simply privileges the game in gameworld, and subjects the world's architecture to the needs of the game, not the physics of our own reality. The world of Mario is no more a simulated reality than the sudoku grid is a map of physical territory.

The Mario games indicate that gamers are able to apprehend a world apart from our own, and apply the learned rules to myriad situations much as we do in the real world. The amazing power of the human brain to deal with abstraction is brought to bear on these games, in order to understand the patterns behind the symbols. This ability remains with gamers, even as we move from the abstract games to those which concern themselves more with simulating a more familiar reality than Mario's.

2. Interface Artefacts

The amount of abstraction gamers are willing to tolerate is note-worthy in many cases. Even for titles that claim to mimic or 'simulate' reality with a great deal of accuracy, a large number of non-real artefacts of 'gameplay' remain. Many of these have to do with interface that is the shorthand for using a clunky controller

and at most six fingers to control an entire humanoid avatar, and the heavy reliance on visual cues to replace the sense-data a person would absorb by being physically present in the gameworld. The interface exists as a film between the player and the avatar in the gameworld. The film is made up of the heads-up display that usually adorns the edges of videogame screens, overlain on the graphical world, and the input device. The interface, of course, makes these games playable, and gamers are often willing to ignore the inconsistency of these tropes in order to participate in the game.

Gamers display great agility in distinguishing between the supposed gameworld and the interface, though they both appear on the screen simultaneously. That is not to say this is a native skill: I have witnessed first-time players of a first-person shooter (*Portal*) position themselves poorly by misinterpreting the HUD elements as all relating to the centre of the character, rather than representing the right-hand. Though it would be easy, today, to program an avatar-based game with no additional information on the screen than the physical gameworld as would be seen by the player/character, this is usually not enough information to play the game effectively. The videogame avatar is a simulated person in a simulated world, but the player does not (with today's technology) have direct access to their sensorium. The videogame has to simulate the collected awareness that a game character would have, primarily about the avatar's body, and the general 'gamestate.'

Relaying information from the gameworld to the player is the first job of a videogame's interface. Since the possible gamestates are virtually infinite in an avatar-based game world, heads-up displays often flag contextual situations where a particular action button can be used to perform myriad actions, from opening doors, pressing buttons to lighting fires or untying a captive NPC. These flags will alert the player to the possibility of interacting with the gameworld, which invokes the interface's second function: converting button-presses or other input methods into gameworld actions.

One of the abstract artefacts between player and the game world is often the player/character's ammunition, weapon status, health and other statistics. This is a slowly fading artefact, in that ammunition is shown on the weapon itself in *Halo* and *Dead Space*, for example. The latter makes great efforts to eliminate any of the remaining barrier between player and gameworld, by projecting all information into a holographic image in front of the avatar, where it is/would be visible to both the player and the character.

The health of the player/character is an abstraction not only in terms of visual artefacts, but also as a conceptual one. The vast majority of combat-related avatar-based games rely on a 'health bar' of some sort to denote the damage the player/character (or other NPCs in many cases) can sustain before 'dying.' This is an abstraction of the human body's ability to continue functioning even after being injured, but falls obviously short in most cases. Most player/characters can take a bullet to the leg, and while losing some numerical amount of health, will not limp,

or show signs of injury at all. Contemporary videogames feature regenerative health in most cases, where the 'health bar' may disappear into to the inner machine, but other signs of trauma will be visible. A pulsing red haze (often accompanied by a loud heartbeat or heavy breathing) is the most common, which becomes more intense the closer the character is to death. Hiding in cover for a brief period will allow the character to recover, and continue on as if never injured in the first place. This trope eliminates the need for unbelievable 'health packs,' but may be just as difficult to believe as the world littered with first aid kits.

The minimap is an ironic example of an abstract trope utilised by many videogames, which has actually become a reality. Modern GPS units are, effectively, minimaps as they appear in videogames: a small, scrolling map of the area which places the player/character on the map itself, instead of having to extrapolate one's position based on visual cues. Some games, like Molyneux's *Fable 2*, have abandoned the minimap, hoping to achieve a more immersive experience that is truer to life, despite the fact that many of us now navigate the real world based on an animated minimap in our phones or car dashboards. The glittering breadcrumb trail that replaces the minimap function in *Fable 2* is just as much an intruder into the gameworld as the minimap is at the interface layer.

These abstractions are vestigial remains of the 'original' abstract gameness in otherwise visually realistic videogames. They are the evidence of the structure, in that they are literally indicators of the status of the system behind the synthetic world. The logical conclusion of this progression towards visual (and auditory) verisimilitude would be the afore-mentioned game with no unexplained HUD elements, no exclamation points above NPC characters, no floating health packs, etc. This would be, at least on screen, the Matrix, the Holodeck, but would be a very difficult game to play. One of the elements of an effective game is goals, and describing the goal and the player's progress towards it would be very difficult without some form of abstract shorthand. There must be a balance of 'videogame elements' with the metaphor, at least in this generation of games.

Sebastien Puel, producer of Ubisoft's *Assassin's Creed 2*, describes this balance between the immersive quality of metaphor, and the relationship to those videogame elements: '…All the platforming ingredients were shiny and different…We decided 'no, a pole should be a pole, it should be an architectural element, not a videogame pole.' From that point I've tried to hide videogame moments as much as possible. In *Assassin's Creed* [the first instalment] maybe we went too far with that experiment. Now we've struck a balance where the game elements exist, but the immersion of the world is much more important than those game parts.'[4] Essentially, there must be a balance between the gameworld looking like a real world, and having enough visual cues for the player to understand which ledges or poles his avatar will be able to climb on or swing from.

Puel goes on to compare this balance to ostensibly similar games like *Hitman* which offer deliberate and sometimes restrictive methods through which to

eliminate assassination targets. The methods, such as poisoning food or explosive rigged barbeques are less metaphor and more structured because they are not optional, nor an emergent configuration of the built-in mechanics of the world. They are set pieces, which could just as easily be exchanged for something else in the gameworld. Agent 47 infiltrates the area, sets a trap, then escapes in each of these examples. One can quickly grasp this structure in *Hitman*, and similarly in the first *Assassin's Creed*, because the Ubisoft team relied on a rigid structure rather than creating a robust enough metaphor to allow for the player's emergent tactics. The *Hitman*-style set-pieces are essentially of the same character as older, more abstract 'hit the boss 3 times' requirements. The metaphor is better, but the creativity of the user is restricted.

3. Necessary Artifice

That the open-world simulator has yet to be realised does not mean that it will never be. That I resolutely argue that the experiences one would have within a truly comprehensive simulation would not be narrative does not discount their value either. We do not discredit the life experiences of a wise elder because they were not constructed by an author. There is clear potential for learning, for a broadening of horizons, within a true-to-life simulator. The most obvious of these is quite simply a 'day in another man's shoes' that is not feasible in many situations. The experience from this could be very enriching indeed. Yet even this is not exactly true to life in that some directorial mind has guided one user towards the lived path of another. Leaving that user to his own devices might simply see him avoid the prescribed experience, and instead seek out activities in the simulator that are much more like his own real life.

Like the initial description of many early twentieth-century adventure novels as being the found manuscript of some absent explorer, with the actual author purporting to be merely an editor, the tropes and abstractions of today's interactive media may (and probably will) seem quaint and antiquated to future users and players. They are, however, still quite necessary in guiding an as-yet inexperienced audience towards the experience the auteur has created. Novels and films retain many 'abstractions' that make the medium more accessible. Chapter breaks in a novel or a wide establishing shot are both abstract, not to be taken literally, but serve important purposes that audiences are quite happy to interpret. Health bars and XP are similarly functional in videogames as they stand today. These kinds of abstractions, whether these precise examples or not, will likely remain part of this particular type of videogame for many years to come.

Notes

[1] J. Juul, *Half-Real: Video Games between Real Rules and Fictional Worlds,* The MIT Press, Cambridge, 2005.

[2] M-L. Ryan, *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence and Narrative Theory*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1991.
[3] J. Juul, loc. cit.
[4] Edge, 'Renaissance Hitman', *Edge Magazine Online*, http://www.edge-online.com, October 21, 2009.

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Games as Activity: Correcting the Digital Fallacy

Jaakko Stenros & Annika Waern

Abstract
Game studies would benefit from acknowledging that digital games should be studied as a special case of games rather than the other way around. Digital games research tends to look at games as fixed structures or media, largely ignoring the role of the player. Conversely, play and player studies tend to ignore the role of design. We argue that in order to uncover the relationship between game design, game activity and game experience we need to put the *game activity* in central focus. If games are approached from this perspective, we should study them simultaneously as consciously designed and socially enacted.

Key Words: Games, play, activity theory, game design, digital fallacy, enacted experience, consciously designed.

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1. Introduction

The field of game studies is currently dominated by the study of digital games, and rightly so, due to their economic and rapidly increasing cultural significance in society. To a large extent it seems that currently general game studies are a subsection of digital game studies, not the other way around. Treating digital games as the standard of games is both analytically flawed and intellectually dishonest.

This *digital fallacy* has had a profound effect of game studies, especially on how the central concept of 'game' is framed. Game studies have largely focused on the deconstruction and analysis of the structures and mechanics of games, which has strongly impacted the discussion on what constitutes a game. In game studies, games are most often seen as *systems*.[1] This has made the play *activity* an under-explored area of game studies.

Games are always *second order design*; game designers create structures that guide player engagement and activity, but their experience is created by their activity with and within the game, and not primarily by the game itself.[2] It can be argued that games are not complete until they are played. This holds for all games, be it computer games, card games, board games or sports.

In this short chapter we argue that looking at games *only* as systems is detrimental to game studies in the long run. Instead, we argue that studying games as activities should be an important part of game studies, on par with studying the game rules, aesthetics, experiences and interaction models.

2. The Digital Fallacy

Digital games are a special case of games. Though they are a diverse group, they share tendencies towards certain features, features that are not as characteristic of games in general as they are of digital games.

Digital games are largely centred on creating, maintaining and interacting with *simulations* – probably because, as many researchers have pointed out, computers are excellent tools for just that.[3] Even those digital games that are not strictly speaking simulations often automate the systemic side of running the game. There is usually no need for a human actor who runs the game such as a gamemaster, a croupier, or a referee, as the *facilitation of playing* is done by the system.[4] As these rules are coded, altering them is cumbersome. In digital games it is *harder to establish house rules*, as changing the system is much more difficult when it is coded than when the facilitation of playing is done by the players themselves. The rules can be changed, and indeed it is standard practice for both the players and the manufacturers to do so.[5]

In comparison to non-digital games, digital games are also more *often single player games*.[6] The perceived dominance of the single-player games in digital games has been questioned during the last decade by the success of massively multiplayer online worlds, party games with mimetic interfaces, casual games and social games.[7] Even so, the computational challenge that a computer can offer has created a strong tradition of single-player games unrivalled in the history of games.

This emphasis on the single player games and the systemic view as well as the tendency for everything to be documented in digital domains has meant that *social play and the sociability surrounding playing has been easily separated from the 'game'*.[8] It is interesting to contrast this with the words of non-digital game designer Richard Garfield: 'it is hard to have a good game experience no matter how good the game is if the metagame is bad.' By metagame Garfield means 'how the game interfaces outside of itself'; that is, the sociability in and around a game.[9]

Finally, due to the simulation capabilities of computers, many digital games are based on *fictional worlds* and feature strong narrative structures.[10] Though there are non-digital games with strong fictional worlds, many digital games emphasize the storyline of the game to the point that its story content is exhausted after one or a few play-throughs. Few non-digital games are these kinds of *games of progression*.[11]

Viewing games in general through the spectacles of digital games and by generalizing the features presented above creates what we call *digital fallacy*. Treating digital games as the measure of normalcy severely limits the understanding of those games that do not fit the digital mould. It also tends to disregard the activity of play in regards to digital games – and even the agency of the player.

3. The Systemic View of Games

It seems that the most oft-cited definitions of games in game studies are the ones supplied by Jesper Juul[12] and Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman.[13] Both definitions prioritize the systemic nature of games, something that the older definitions of games rarely do. Indeed, the nature of gameplay as an *activity* features prominently at least in the definitions of Johan Huizinga, Roger Caillois, Bernard Suits, Clark Abt and even Elliott Avedon and Brian Sutton-Smith.[14] Researchers who have been writing mostly about digital games do write about games from various angles, cultural, systemic, activity-based, commoditization, but ultimately they tend to favour systemic definitions. The players incorporated in such a system are not the human, social creatures that play games in the real world, but idealized, rational decision makers.[15]

One reason for this emphasis on structure and system instead of player activity is most likely a methodological concern. Studying a game as a system can be perceived as more objective than the study of play activities. In order to access the activity, a game needs to be played. This creates a paradox: the researcher either needs to play the game – which means that she is a participant and her personal experience may be seen as tainting the work – or the researcher needs to study other people who play a game – in which case she only has second hand information on the activity. When games are viewed as systems the activity of playing the game is done just in order to *access* the underlying system.

This methodological concern is a bit of an ostrich argument. If we embrace the idea that games are second order design, the question can be asked if a game *even exists* until it is played. Indeed, Laura Ermi and Frans Mäyrä have gone so far as to state that 'the essence of a game is rooted in its interactive nature, and there is no game without a player.'[16] Game studies acknowledge this in practice, if not in theory, as many ludologists consider the playing of the game under scrutiny a pivotal part of the research.[17]

Staffan Björk has advocated that field of game research should be understood as divided into three parts based on the object of study: the game as an artefact, the gamer as an agent, and the gaming as activity. However, this division runs a risk of ignoring the effect a player has on a game. Björk recognized this, and points out that results from the study of playing can be 'distilled to design knowledge that can be considered when designing a game system.'[18] We take this a step further and propose that play affects games in a much more direct way. An iterative cycle of redesigning the game by the designer is not needed; players have an impact on the game artefact in shaping it through play. Or to put it in another way, there is an overlap between play and design.[19]

A successful approach to play activity study would not only benefit the study of non-digital games. Tanja Sihvonen has argued that the success of *The Sims*, one of the most successful digital game franchises there is, 'cannot be explained by its intrinsic characteristics only'; one must look at the playing of the game.[20]

We propose that a fruitful approach to analysing game activity is from a double perspective, building on the claim that game activities are at the same time both *consciously structured* and *enacted*.

4. Consciously Structured

All human endeavours are socially situated and embodied. Those features do not differentiate gameplay from, say, working or shopping for groceries. What does mark gameplay apart is that games are activities that are *consciously structured* in some way. Modern games are consciously designed by a game designer. Many traditional games – as well as some contemporary styles of playing – are products of a long cultural evolution.[21] However, even these games are subjected to redesign, such as in the design of the play tools and often in the form of house rules governing each particular play situation.

Games are hardly unique as designed activities. On the contrary, it is not uncommon for humans to engage in activities that have been consciously designed. In many cases, it is necessary to design activities to make society function. Designed activities are in fact so common, that we often do not reflect upon the fact that our behaviour has been structured by an external party. When the milk is placed at the very back of the grocery store, we rarely reflect on the fact that the milk run is consciously designed to force us to pass as many shelves as possible – in the hopes that we will pick up a few additional articles.[22]

Some keys to activity design can be found in the architectural distinction between of *places*, as locations meaningful to humans and locus of human activity – and *spaces* as the spatial and geometrical setting of that activity.[23] Human activity is constantly shaped by consciously designed places, from the bathroom to the church. The board game boards, the virtual worlds and the fields, pitches and stadiums play these roles for games. In addition, human activity is often shaped through instruments such as explicit rules and instructions, and a structured pace. We can use the security control of an airport as an archetypical example: the security control *is a place*, as it is located in physical space and it has a certain architectural design and installations that make us immediately recognize the intended function of the place. At the same time, there is *a procedure* that people passing through preferably should follow, akin to the interaction methods of a game. Often there is an instruction video running at a monitor in front of the security control. The procedure is supported by various *installations* and finally the conveyer belt that moves our bags sets the *pace* for the throughput of the security control. Finally, by playing along in the security control ritual, *participants* get an experience.

On the surface, the difference between the security control and a game seems not to be that large. The core difference lies instead in their purpose: the security control in an airport has several teleological purposes. For players of a game, the purpose of playing is (at least according to the hegemonic ideal) *paratelic*[24]: The

activity of playing a game is not a means to an end but the end in itself.[25] In Huizinga's words, the basic conceptualization of play is that it is *voluntary* and *needless*[26] and according to Suits there is an *lusory attitude*, 'the acceptance of constitutive rules just so the activity made possible by such acceptance can occur', at play.[27]

5. Enacted Experiences

As discussed previously, game design is realised only as the players engage with the game. Gameplay is thus an *enacted experience*: what we experience is not 'the game' but a play session, and that session does not exist unless we actively create it.

Just as designed activities, enacted experiences are not uncommon in society. Going to a masquerade, dancing at a wedding, participating in a sauna evening are all examples of social events that have as their main focus to create an experience for the participants. Enacted experiences are also often at least partly designed; just as traditional games they are often supported by consciously designed environments and tools, and sometimes by explicit (house) rules. These tools, environments and rules are designed to heighten and facilitate the experience, but they are not enough to create it: just entering a sauna does not generate a sauna experience; just as swinging a tennis racket does not transmit the experience of a demanding match of tennis.

Two aspects of enacted experiences influence how we should study game activity. The first is that enacted experiences are socially constructed and transferred. One needs to have an expectation of what to experience, in order to fully understand and enjoy it. If you have never been to a sauna or participated in a wine tasting, chances are that you will not appreciate it at all. [28] Many enacted experiences require a lot of training in order to achieve the full experience. Downhill skiing, lindy-hop dancing, playing the trumpet in a jazz jam session, all are highly rewarding but also *difficult* activities.

The other aspect is that participants must *engage*, voluntarily and properly, in order to experience anything at all. This aspect clearly marks games as enacted experiences; almost all game systems can be interpreted and enacted in numerous different ways. The same game can be played in completely different styles, while still adhering to the rules, players may take on very different attitudes in different sessions with a game, and sometimes the attitudes will vary also within the same game session.

The expected attitudes of players influence the game played. A particularly illuminating example can be found within role-playing studies. Tabletop role-playing games have inspired a lot of expert hobbyists to write essays and construct models. One of these is the typology that divides playing and game-mastering styles to *dramatism, gamism* and *simulationism*.[29] The first values a satisfying storyline, the second winning over a fair challenge and the third in modelling a

world with highest possible fidelity. John Kim describes the modes as 'contracts' that govern both how players are expected to behave, but also what kind of experience the gamemaster is trying to build. Similarly Anders Drachen found that 97% of people who play *Tomb Rider: Underworld*, a single player digital game, follow one of four specific play style patterns,[30] and Nicole Lazzaro identified four distinct types of enjoyment in computer games.[31]

Enacted experiences are often governed by various boundary structures that delimit what constitutes the experience, as well as when and where it is enacted, and who are enacting it. Caillois, Huizinga and Erving Goffman emphasise that games, by design, are *set apart* from ordinary life.[32] Game rules and other game structures are important not only in order to structure the actual activity, but also in creating the boundary of the game frame – even if that boundary is porous and subject to renegotiation.

6. Conclusions

In this short article, we have deliberately stayed away from any delimiting definition of what a game is, or even, what it means to engage in a game activity. Our analysis frames games as residing in the sweet-spot intersection between designed activities and enacted experiences; they are consciously designed activities that we engage in purely in order to experience something. But games share these properties with activities that we do not consider to be games: bungee-jumping, riding a rollercoaster, and even going to the cinema all belong to this category of human activity. Our framing is not intended to replace the analyses of Huizinga, Caillois, Sutton-Smith, Salen and Zimmerman, or Juul, but to complement them; it is intended to provide an alternative perspective. Rather, the fact that it groups games together with numerous other human activities opens up new perspectives for the study of games: if playing a game is similar to bungee-jumping, what can we learn from the design of such paideic activities in designing games? Conversely, what can roller-coaster ride designers learn from game design?

In order to even start to answer such questions, the theoretical perspective presented in this chapter has to be deconstructed into various design approaches and modes of engagement, focussing on understanding their interrelationship in the game-as-played activity.

An example of such a design principle could be *openness*. This ideal seeks to make games as responsive as possible to player initiative and control. It appears in many different game genres, with slightly different objectives as to what part of the game should be submitted to player control. The reason that it arises could be understood both as a desire to give players more agency than they have in many societal designed activities (such as security controls), and creating room for supporting a range of different enacted experiences. But at the same time, games are not open spaces where anything goes: the rules and goals of the game do

structure activity and infuse meaning into enactment. Striking this balance is hardly straight-forward, and studying games from this perspective requires close reading of game-as-played.

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The Videoludic Pleasure: Between Isotopies and Revolutions

Enrico Gandolfi

Abstract
The aim of research is to describe the videoludic medium from a semiotic point of view, trying to create specific models of narration and interaction and to re-elaborate and to calibrate the analysis instruments of the discipline. The attempt is to map the mechanisms of creation of meaning and pleasure in the videogame, being faced it not only like 'text' (or 'hypertext'), tendency diffused in the structuralist semiotic, but like a phenomenon more complex, leaving from the interface, the relationship with the avatar till a redefinition of the audience. These hypothetical models of reference that we want to delineate are different in the link with other media languages, in the 'immersion' and in the 'emersion', in the isotopies on the plans of the form and of the content. We want to put our attention then in reference to the skills requested, to the videoludic pleasure and to the dimension beyond the screen, in contrast with an optical that considers videogames simply as a 'black box'. The objective is therefore on one side to improve the semiotic approach and to make it the operating base; the other to enrich our observations with sociological, ludology's, pataphisic, philosophical and aesthetic contributions.

Key Words: Strutturalist semiotic, Umberto Eco, videoludic pleasure, Generation 'y', narrative programme, ludic dark horse.

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1. An Ontologic Matter

The simple question 'What is a videogame?' It is a point of crucial importance that makes the difference between positions and peculiarities of the various approaches to the digital entertainment analysis. We can find a lot of responses, such as Maietti's and Murray's; however, the question obviously has to be studied in a deeper way. Ludologists prefer to start with the definition of 'game', referring to an established tradition begins by Huizinga and his precursor *Homo Ludens*. Juul in *Half Real* condensed into a single summary all the definitions that have been imposed for decades by many authors, like Caillois, Salen and Zimmerman:

> A game is a ruled-based system with a variable and quantifiable outcome, where different outcomes are assigned different values, the player exerts effort in order to influence the outcome, the player feels emotionally attached to the outcome, and the consequences of the activity are negotiable.[1]

The problem is if we need the term 'game' in the binomial one, or if we have to replace it with a more appropriate word; many researchers have created new meanings, like the 'narrating machines' or the 'interactive matrixes' invented by some young Italian semioticist. We don't sincerely feel the need to make further terms, and we believe that the traditional definition is academically productive and also actual, without falling in the dangerous temptation to multiply the concept without caution and a precise measure.

We will start from the definition of 'game': what Juul codifies remains valid, but it requires some changes for our aim. First we don't want to summon the emotional involvement, of course matter that needs to be analyzed but that cannot be taken as fundamental criterion because its indeterminateness (and subjectivity); we will replace it with the assumption of the role, of an illusion (the entrance in game: 'in-lusio') not anything else that the share through a sense over the visual one; secondarily the anticipated outcome doesn't have to be predictable neither to appear automatic to the player: we call this indeterminateness, that is able to dress different natures, the 'ludic dark horse'.

A presence that would give sense to a reality not ended, reported to the imagination or to trace the concrete (division with which Crawford distinguished between what is videogame and what not), but to indefinite one, never totally predictable, that 'plays' on this question. Referring to tradition, for the characteristics that prefigure the videogame as a form of 'uncertain simulation', we connect our peculiar idea of ludic practice to the category 'Mimicry' of Caillois: to be other from itself in order to recognize, to experiment the alternative. Not only the perfect category for the videogame, but also a basic element for every game (a fundamental requisite) antechamber of the other typologies listed by the French sociologist. If we think in every game, and particularly in electronic ones, the investiture in an 'other from myself' is an intrinsic element, essential, the true source of the engagement.

In the game designers' literature, for example in Bartle's operate, this consapevolence often appears: to try my limits and to transmigrate in a simulacra, experimenting and playing with my personality; different psychological schools like the Symbolic Interazionism of Mead or the 'as if' of Vigostszy and Brunner see in these dynamics the focus of the individual education and growth; after all, as Huizinga said, the game is more ancient than the story. This 'frame' is characterized and it is selected because its indeterminateness. It's the game essence. This covers the videoludic medium view as a form of communication.

Now we pass to the 'video': also here we decide to maintain the word, and to use it to describe instead the technological support on which the video game founds itself (closing the picture proposed by Cosenza, where a medium has both communication and technological possibilities). 'Video' in such association stands for 'interactive electronic interface'. Always according to Cosenza, for electronic interface we intend the 'components hardware and software that allow the people

to communicate and to work with the system'. We characterize such technology, that we know can have many ramifications, in to furnish a virtual (what we could identify as 'media illusion') element through a graphic (but it is not said that is exclusively founded upon the sight) electronic interface that allows the interaction (through one, two or all the senses, it doesn't care; it cares it requests activity). At the end, what's for us a videogame?

Uniting the two explanations, the answer it will be the following: 'that practice that uses an interactive electronic interface to explore a ludic dark horse.' If we want to report us to an artefact, it will be enough to replace to 'practice' 'text.'

2. Homo Ludens: Face of a New Nation

We think about the audience, from the nerds to the working women recently enlisted in the lines of the so-called 'casual gamers.' Today more and more the everyday life of the new generations meets the videogame, and we are talking about a very heterogeneous spectre of targets, no more identifiable in the teen-ager or in the young adult male. We don't speak therefore of a uniform mass, that can be easily described in a single term like the imaginary *Generation X*, characterised by the possession of an intimate story for the ruin of diffused and shared values; neither we want to use 'Y, Z and similar' generations, able to move across the various media, above all those based on internet and the 'always on'.

If we want indeed to create a word and surrender to the temptation, It could be hypothesized that, after the greed of an 'one man show' narration against the death of the great ideologies, it's shinning the 'y' generation, letter that stands for 'incomplete x': a vision that doesn't ask ended and limited plots, because it wants to feel itself free to escape from the text, and to participate to an endless trip of creation and reformulation; a generation that pretends the dizziness of the incompleteness. This research is not absolutely new: the same Baroque movement, with its inexhaustible details and unsatisfied spirals, was the reaction to the collapse of the Ptolemaic system, to an Earth not more centre of the universe, in a dreadful relativism. It was to follow the shiver of a revolution that changed the thoughts consolidated of the epoch, and to embrace the indefinite, the absence of certainties.

While Copernico and Galileo have unhinged the illusion with observations and scientific discoveries, now they are the horrors of the last century, the materialization of spaces, the economic crisis and the speed and plurality of our times that show us that cannot exist an absolute truth, neither a static position; just a continuous movement, that the media can favour and communicate. The same tribal marketing founds itself on the creation of active communities of consumption, untied from the old values, that support and contemporarily contribute to a determined style of life; consumer and author, affiliation and individuality, carried and satisfied in a specific and unique trial; the sunset of the main myths of the family, of the political party and of every other safety has made

us orphans, middle children of the history, grown with dreams and unattainable aspirations. To furnish narrative spaces, in order to escape but also to meet the other according to new parameters, this is the medial answer of our society.

The discourse and the linked topics like tribal branding, UGC or cross media traductions, reveal the identical intuition and similar needs. The common point between application of individual intervention and question of social identity is identified with the tendency, recurrent today, to create universes more than plots: to give contexts, fantastic and detailed, that act as stage for readers' imagination, over that the canonical stories, closed.

The closure, the end of the story, provokes a missed appeasement sensation, although a finished sense and clarifying ethic are reassuring. There are world's structures stronger (the reference is to the mythology, to the ideology, to the modalities of social cohabitation) and others weaker (mediation, discourses, conventions). We are assisting at the end of the great tides of thought (a more consistent definition would be 'metanarrations', or the main plots behind every story), that implied compact masses, sensible to general messages; the post-modernism, in which I can say everything and the contrary of everything, is a period of transition toward new values and needs (the environmental cause, maybe), and the traditional unidirectional expressive channels show an inactivity and a chronic incapability to face such challenges, for which also the term 'target' sounds too much general and not representative.

3. The Authoriality

In our view, there are three macroareas of authorality of first level, also linked to the four phases of the narrative program design by Greimas (*contratto*-briefing, *competenza*-learning competence, *performanza*-to do what I have to do, *sanzione*-the result of my actions): the *performanza* is the single action of consumption that makes honour to the active nature that the videogame offers; but every performanza is influenced above all by one of the other three phases, and this strongly depends on the type of creator. We speak of lines of tendency, with the presence therefore of hybrids. Each of them has a particular 'model reader' (Eco), a textual strategy inside the opera that suggests and builds the ideal reader for that type of work.

Set Authorality (*Little Big Planet*, *ModNation Racers*, *Trials: HD*, *Sim City*, etc.): in this category the other dominant phase is the Contract (the briefing about the videogame mission): the author, in this case destinant and assistant figure, carries the attention of the player to express himself and his relative potential. We can speak of authorality of second level: the consumer is the author, because the developer limits himself to furnish utensils, an environment with some cause-effect rules, and is the player who decides the rest; there isn't an empirical closing of the text, if not inside the player's created substories. The managerial genre is a bland form of such tendency, up to the products that give the same engine with which

they have been created. It's here that the definition of 'open work' is more appropriate.

Rule Authorality (*Rock Band*, *Ninja Gaiden*, *Lost Planet*, *Monster Hunter*, etc.): in products as *Guitar Hero*, *Wii Sports*, and action, casual and indie games, the story is marginal and counts the mere performance; it's evident the importance of the ability, of the measurement, of the comparison, eventually of the context out of the screen. The author helps and tries to furnish to player the necessary competence to overcome the challenge.

Revelation Authorality (*Red Dead Redemption*, *Fable*, *Alan Wake*, *Heavy Rain*, etc.): here the author in who, dressing again the role of destinant, cares about the sanction, what the player desires. The result can be given or from the environment (*Fable*, in which according to my moral choices the avatar will change and the same scenery will suffer the consequences of my decisions) or from the story (I play to observe the evolution of the plot). This difference is notable, because while in the first case is implied an open structure, the second one often pretends a linear developing.

4. The Pleasure, Dynamic Meaning Mechanism

We have individualized two couples of extremes: Emersion - Immersion and Control - Wonder. These concepts are in fact based not on the 'what' but on the 'how', and their state has a continuous and moving constitution (they change to remain the same). It's without sense the question 'what's beautiful?'; it's more important asking ourselves what are the procedures through which such adjective is transmitted. Obviously also the values must be studied in their single dimensions, but our priority is to understand with what engagement they are expressed and become reality for the consumer. The conception of pleasure isn't anything else than the dynamic side of the value; by it abstract becomes motive of consumption, from the depth it is projected to the surface (through colours, gameplay, representations and sound).

The four main pleasures:

Immersion: escape from the reality, in a few words to lose myself in another world and to experiment a different psycho-physique state. It's a needs already individualized by the Theories of the Transmission and by the Frankfurt's School. It's the correspondent of the ludic valorisation, if we want, but undoubtedly it also behaves consequences on the utopian side. The use of continuous debrayages (elements that trying to give an idea of objectivity and distance between videogame world and real one) in this case is strongly recommended, and maybe iconic input can disturb such feeling (the real movement may ruin the illusion). Also stops and pauses (death, rescues, loadings) make lacks in the Immersion. This pleasure is helped by a good plot and by characterized actors, able to guarantee a good rhythm of events, both active than passive for the player.

Emersion: cathartic force that makes clear own internal aspects and processes, and that let them 'emerge.' I can use a text to reveal our depth, our mechanisms and our inclination. This kind of production instigates the thoughts on our dimension, focalizing on our 'here and now'; self meditation rooms, incubators of critical minds, an inner trip of resumption of my brain. A realistic design, a style of everyday life gameplay, a system of values without filters, all these things help such vision.

Wonder: To be amazed and to trace the subversive strength of the experience. But after the experience must follow the knowledge, as Aristotle teaches. And it needs to be careful about the loss of control that it involves. Sometimes the control system is useful (*Prototype* or *God of War*, when you lost every power) to instauration of this feeling. It's the 'psyche', the not controllable, the suspension of the judgment. It have to be maintained, because it naturally diminishes. Beautiful graphic, strange values, plot with twist and surprises; I can capsize the expectations and transcend my time tracing new sways.

Control: A feeling of omnipotence in scenery that is at my will against the unpredictability all around us. But if everything were resolvable and granted, life would lose its beauty. To the initial wonder it often follows instead a gradual learning that however shouldn't flow in a boring experience. It is the 'techne' and the motive for which the men have created the magic (the necessity to give regularity to the irregularity). Installed it, it remains constant. We must analyze what elements of certainty and uncertainty are present.

These are obviously trends, topics that have to be investigated and that surely we will analyze in future. In fact the game touches a need inherent in the human nature: as Vinge and his theory of Positivity say, the human imagination does the work of natural selection, speeding it and save us from death as a primary filter for the evolution of our species. We can imagine outside of us, predict consequences, make conjectures. The game is the primary tool for that attitude. The videogame becomes, in our opinion, the media coverage of similar aspiration; it uses technology at the service of our potential as a species. To sum up, the human medium for excellence.

Notes

[1] J. Juul, *Half-Real: Video Games between Real Rules and Fictional Worlds*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 2005, p. 36.

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The Gamemaster-Approach to Game Studies

Tobias Unterhuber

Abstract
In my chapter I will argue for the following points: (a) The core assumption of Role-Playing Games (RPG) hold for all types of videogames. (b) The gamemaster concept from RPG can be efficiently applied to videogames. This concept represents a coherent framework which allows the integration of both ludological and narratological aspects of videogames. The present approach, hence, provides a solution to the recent debate on ludological and narratological approaches to computer games.

Key Words: Game theory, role-playing games, role-playing game theory, ludological-narratological approach, gamemaster.

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What are videogames? Games or narrations? The investigation of videogames does not clearly appeal against either approach. A closer look at videogames rather reveals that both positions allow for a unique perspective on the phenomenon of videogames and are, hence, valuable. Although this consensus has become more and more widespread in recent years, I am not aware of any approach in the literature which allows for a natural and coherent synthesis of both ludological and narratological approaches to videogames. In this chapter I shall propose such a synthesis of ludological and narratological approaches on the basis of the concept of the gamemaster. Since the concept of a gamemaster was originally proposed for Role-Playing Game (RPG), I first discuss in how far the assumptions of RPG also apply to computer games. Secondly, I outline my gamemaster approach and indicate how this approach can be fruitfully applied for the analysis of both ludological and narratological aspects of videogames.

1. Every Game is a Role-Play

In this section I focus on the relation between RPGs and other types of games. I argue for the thesis that any type of game and in particular videogames can be viewed as a type of RPGs. My thesis is based on the assumption that every game is a role-play.[1] Whichever kind of game one is playing, the first step is to become a player or, more precisely, to take on the role of a player. In this role we can act in the game, while still being an out-of-game-person. Britta Neitzel states,

> this playful ‘as if’ or ‘act like somebody’ that is for example constitutive for role-playing is realized in videogames by the

> doubling of the player's body into a real and a data-body [translation Tobias Unterhuber (T. U.)].[2]

I follow Neitzel in making the same fundamental distinction, but use the alternative terminology *material self* (player's body) and *virtual self* (data-body). I agree with Neitzel - even though she uses her argument in a different context - that this distinction is not only crucial for Role-playing games (RPGs),[3] but also for other types of games. The distinction between material self and virtual self is applicable to any type of game, even board games such as Chess or Go. In the latter type of games the real person has to take on the perspective of the virtual self and act as a player in the frame of the game. In videogames the distinction between material self and virtual self is still more pronounced, based on the specific Avatar-player-relation.

Since any type of game employs the principal distinction between material self and virtual self, it is also a central aspect of any game that the game player *acts as/like somebody*. To act as/like somebody is, however, a core aspect of RPGs.[4] Note also that the concept of a gamemaster essentially makes only this one assumption, namely that the game player acts as/like somebody. In videogames the aspect of *acting as/like somebody* is particularly prominent. The player is duplicated, since there is a player in front of the monitor (material self) and a player inside the game (virtual self). This barrier can neither be ignored nor breached. The only viable solution to this problem is to render it as a doubling-process, which emphasizes the aspect of *acting as/like somebody*. 'This distinction is pivotal because it helps the player to differ between herself and the Avatar which follows her tasks in the virtual world'[5] [translation T.U.]. The fact that one always controls in videogames an Avatar or some kind of game character(s) distinguishes videogames from other narrative mediums: A videogame needs not only a player as a book needs a reader, making both the game and the book a pre-narration which has to be completed by the recipient.[6] The videogame also needs the player to control and develop the virtual self.

This is not only crucial for computer-RPGs (CRPGs) and adventure games, for which it is typical that one controls an Avatar or a group of avatars on the one hand or one character at the time on the other hand, respectively.[7] The basic structure also applies to other genres, such as strategy games. Regardless whether one considers real-time strategy games (e.g. *Age of Empires*, *Command & Conquer*) or turn-based strategy games (e.g. *Heroes of Might and Magic*), the structure is basically the same: One takes on, as the material self, the role of the virtual self inside the game and controls a number of game characters. What role you take on inside the game is often not predetermined. You might, for example, be some kind of commander or leader. This is also the way the player is addressed by his units in *Warcraft III*.

2. The Gamemaster

Ludological and narratological approaches to videogames are controversially debated in game studies for a decade or longer. Both types of approaches differ in their basic conceptualization of videogames: Either videogames are understood as games and, hence, as formal rule-based systems (e.g. Gonzalo Frasca[8] or Jesper Juul[9]). Or, alternatively, videogames are conceptualized as narrations and are regarded as narrative media with a specific type of mediality (e.g. Janet Murray[10]). In recent years the consensus that both perspectives can be prolific and interesting started to grow but as far as I know there is no concept integrating both approaches to be found in the literature. The gamemaster-system might serve as a way to naturally bring together aspects of both sides in a coherent synthesis. But before we can spell out the concept of a gamemaster for videogames, we have to take a closer look at this concept in its original context.

In classic pen & paper RPGs (P&P RPGs) one can distinguish between two different roles of participants in the framework of the game: the player and the gamemaster. The player is in charge of a character whom she represents and who is her virtual self or Avatar. The player takes on the role of her character, controls and describes the character's actions in the game and in this way narrates a part of the story or the game. Most typically P&P RPGs are played with two to six players and one gamemaster.

The gamemaster is in charge of the game setting and the outline of the plot. She is also a type of referee and ensure that all players oblige to the rules of the game. She, moreover, judges the decisions and actions of the players according to the players' character traits. The game master presents the world of the fiction to the players, including all relevant persons, objects and events. She is, in particular, in charge of all non-player-characters and their reactions to the actions of the players. Even though in some P&P RPG systems the gamemaster is actually called *story-teller* (cf. *Vampire: The Masquerade*), one can see that it is much more than that: the gamemaster is actor, story-teller, referee, writer, stage-worker and more, all in one person.[11] However, the spectrum of roles and functions of the concept of a gamemaster is so broad that I propose to regard the gamemaster as a concept which goes beyond the traditional concept of a narrator. The concept of a gamemaster has two main tasks: (a) to narrate the game (!) and (b) to manage and supervise the game and its rules. Both functions (a) and (b) can also be found in Brigitte Neitzel's analysis of RPGs:

> Where something is narrated, nothing is played, where something is played, nothing is narrated, or to put it in other words: A narration narrates actions, but in a game actions are made. Just after the game has come to an end, you can narrate about it.[12]

I agree with Brigitte Neitzel that both aspects (a) and (b) are present in RPGs. I, however, disagree with her insofar as both aspects (a) and (b) take place in RPGs simultaneously (in Gerard Genette's[13] narratology: simultaneous narration) or at most with minimal time gaps between action and narration. (The latter case is in Genette's narratology a so-called interpolated narration.) The narration of RPGs is the story, which is told on the basis of the playing, and is not the playing itself. The playing itself serves as basis for the narration, but the playing is not part of the narration: It stays extra-diegetic. It is possible that Neitzel intends to include the act of playing in her concept of narration but I think that this is neither helpful nor necessary. If we include the act of playing in the concept of narration, we have to account for single game-runs and all of the individual players' contributions. This leads to an investigation of individuals' game experiences. It is, however, doubtful whether such an approach is fruitful. This approach is comparable to pursuing literature studies by focusing on individuals' reading experiences.

Let us now apply the concept of a gamemaster to videogames. A gamemaster is in charge of forming and telling (showing) the world to the player through virtual images and also by making this world work in all its mechanisms. On an out-game perspective it keeps the game going and is supervising the rules so that the game can be played without errors etc. Unlike in P&P RPGs the concept of gamemaster is not bound to a person, but is inherent to the game, it is in a certain sense the essence of the program. In a somewhat more abstract terminology one could even argue that the gamemaster in videogames is the game itself. It keeps itself running by creating a subsystem inside itself.

This adaption of the concept of a gamemaster allows us to use the same system on both ends: It integrates game aspects and narrative aspects and makes both, the ludological and the narratolgical perspective, applicable within a common and coherent frame of reference. The gamemaster approach, hence, allows for a literary-critic approach towards games. We can, for example, analyse the usage of stylistic devices, while keeping in mind the following two points: These stylistic devices are first mediated by the gamemaster in her narration, and are second based on game-mechanical structures. We can, hence, analyse game-elements as parts of the narration and the game simultaneously.

Let us, for example, take a closer look at the game *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*. In this game there exists a moral system, which rewards good or bad actions of the player with Jedi- and Sith-points, respectively. This is clearly a ludological aspect of the game. However, it is a part of the concept of a gamemaster in videogames that she is in charge of regulating and judging the decisions and actions of the players. This allows us not only to describe the moral system as a game-mechanism but also as a device for the narrative side of the system with which it is pushing the story of the game in either of two directions, creating tension and focusing on dramatic moments in the narration. In the case of *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* the character (and hence the story) is

drawn to either becoming a Jedi knight or else a Sith lord, based on the earlier assignments of Jedi and Sith-points, respectively. Therefore, this element can also be seen as a stylistic device of the gamemaster concept to engage the players in a specific style of playing or narrating.

Based on my argumentation I draw the following conclusions: The gamemaster approach to videogames allows for an integration of ludological and narratological aspects in the analysis of videogames. It, thus, makes it possible to move past the ludology vs. narratology debate and shift the focus from fundamental issues to the application of this concept for the analysis of videogames.
Also I want to point out that if the gamemaster approach could be successfully integrated into the game studies it might even be adapted for the literature studies where it could give us a whole new perspective on literature and maybe even replace the problematic concept of the narrator.

Notes

[1] In German you don't have the difference between Role-playing games and roleplay. The German word 'Rollenspiel' has both meanings.
[2] B. Neitzel, 'Point of View and Point of Action: Eine Perspektive auf die Perspektive in Computerspielen', *Hamburger Hefte zur Medienkultur: Computer/Spiele/Räume - Materialien zur Einführung in die Computer Game Studies*, University of Hamburg, Hamburg, 2007, p. 11.
[3] In Pen & Paper Role-playing games, you can find the situation that the player is either acting as player (out-game/out-time/out-of-character) or as the character (in-game/in-time/in-character). This classification could be helpful later on.
[4] To see how essential this point is for games in general, consider the following line of argument by R.V. Kelly: Kelly argues that one can already find the roots of role-playing games in the Lascaux Cave paintings. For that purpose, he draws out the parallels between the cave paintings and the elements of Massively-Multiplayer-Online-Role-Playing-Games (MMORPGs). In a nutshell, Kelly holds the view that the drawings might have been used as a frame of reference to rehearse or even retell past hunts.
[5] B. Neitzel, op. cit., p. 10.
[6] B. Neitzel, *Gespielte Geschichten. Struktur- und prozessanalytische Unter suchungen der Narrativität von Videospielen*, Bauhaus-University Weimar, last update: 27.05.2010, date of viewing: 27.05.2010, http://e-pub.uni-weimar.de/volltexte/2004/72/, p. 130.
[7] In *Sam & Max* you kind of control two characters at once but the second character, Max, is more like a tool for the main character.

[8] G. Frasca, *Ludology Meets Narratology. Similitude and Differences between (Video)games and Narrative*. Ludology.org, 1999, last viewing: 27.05.2010, http://www.ludology.org/articles/ludology.htm .
[9] J. Juul, *A Clash between Game and Narrative: A Thesis on Computer Games and Interactive* Fiction, University of Copenhagen, Copenhagen, 1999 (in Danish)/ 2001 (in English), Last visited: 27.05.2010, http://www.jesperjuul.net/thesis/AclashBetweenGameAndNarrative.pdf .
[10] J. Murray, *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*, Free Press, New York, 1997.
[11] The gamemaster might be best described as a system.
[12] B. Neitzel, *Gespielte Geschichten. Struktur- und prozessanalytische Unter suchungen der Narrativität von Videospielen*, Bauhaus-University Weimar, Last update: 27.05.2010, date of viewing: 27.05.2010, http://e-pub.uni-weimar.de/volltexte/2004/72/ , p. 9.
[13] G. Genette, *Die Erzählung*, Fink, München, 1998.

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Before Play, Production: Contributions of Political Economy to the Field of Game Studies

Randy Nichols

Abstract
The study of video games has focused largely on questions of effects, learning and play, while a critical examination of production has rarely been touched upon. As a consumer product, video games draw on a number of industries for their production norms. This focus on effect and play without examining the nature of production too often ignores the ways in which play is constrained by the cultural logics of production and the choices - both conscious and unconscious - of producers. This project seeks to understand the globalised process of video game hardware production and its impacts on both the producers of the technologies and the consumers. It views video games as cultural commodities - products of an industry organized around capitalist exchange - that must follow particular logics of production. The critical political economy of communications has long emphasized the importance of understanding these logics in order to understand meaning, particularly ideology. Because video games function differently than commodities like film, music or television - requiring both the active participation and immersion of their audiences - understanding these particular logics provides a key framework for the discussion of the meaning and value of video games. By drawing on a critical political economic framework, with its emphasis on power relations and historical context, questions can be raised about the impact of production and widespread consumption of video games that moves beyond questions of effect and narrative. It builds on the foundation of industrial understanding by researchers like Aphra Kerr and Dimitri Williams in order to describe the major players, power relations and challenges - both created and faced by - this increasingly important cultural industry.

Key Words: Video games, political economy, technology, production, industry, consumption, labour, environment.

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1. Emerging from the First Decade of Game Studies

In a 2002 chapter on the impact of the telephone, Benjamin Bates, Kendra Alrbight, and Kadesha Washington look about on more than 100 years of history of the telephone in order to better make sense of what the telephone is today. For almost a century, they say '[the telephone was] the ability to one another over long distances through a switched, wired network.'[1] Clearly, though, the telephone has become much more than that, presenting a wider range of problems and impacts than its early inventors likely imagined.

Video games face a similar dilemma. While it has been just under ten years since Aarseth formally marked a beginning of video game studies, the study of video games finds itself at a moment where the definition and study of video games needs to be broader than the definition with which we began. In part, our adherence to that limited definition owes to the necessity of legitimizing the study of video games both as an area of study and as a meaningful means of cultural expression. Like many other media forms, video games have been met with a sort of moral panic. The myths that needed to be dispelled about video games are many. Video games are not simple toys with an audience only of children. Nor are they consumed only by males. And there's much more to them than violence.

Over the past decade, many of these concerns have been addressed by a variety of disciplines. Educators and academics have both acknowledged the potential of video games a teaching tool. Similarly, psychologists, medical professionals, and university researchers have addressed the concern over negative effects of video game play. More recently, video games have drawn the attention of cultural studies researchers, literature professors, and anthropologists concerned with what video game stories say about us, how they say, and how we play with them. Presently, the academic study of video games has come to be dominated by the twin poles of narratology and ludology. This formulation very closely mirrors Aarseth's conception of computer game studies in which 'the aesthetic and the social'[2] are linked. But what of the technological and the institutional?

Meanwhile outside of academia, even as debates about how best to cope with questionable video game content, governments around the world are seeking to draw video game production to their shores. Video games are seen as a fast-growing, highly profitable, competitive industry offering desirable jobs. In spite of this, the question of video game production is one that has been largely unaddressed. Perhaps this owes to the relative lack of respect given to video games as a contributor to culture. Or perhaps it is because we, as researchers, have spent so much time valiantly defending video games in particular ways - through the lends of story and magic circles - that we have trouble seeing the forest for the trees.

2. Political Economic Questions for the Study of Games

While ludology and narratology have been instrumental in the legitimization of video games, it has come at the cost of seeing video games as technology, which, as Vincent Mosco notes, means they are a commodity which 'opens up social potentialities,'[3] allowing for dramatic change that may be positive, negative, or both.

A political economic study of video games offers one means to expand the ways in which we think about video games. In one of its earliest articulations, Adam Smith tells us that political economy can be though of as the study of wealth and the allocation of resources. More recently, Vincent Mosco has suggested that

when adapting political economy to the study of communication technologies, that we broaden our terms. For him, political economy becomes 'the study of power relations in society.'[4] Unlike economics, Golding and Murdock demonstrate that political economy must also strive to be both holistic, thinking of these power relations as extending beyond the industries and technologies into other avenues of our lives, and historically contingent. In addition, as Gandy notes, a political economic analysis must consider not just wealth and power but how it is distributed. This allows both an avoidance of economic determinism but also an understanding of the possibility of resistance, a view echoed by Garnahm as well as Meehan, Mosco and Wasko.

Taking these ideas and applying them to the study of video games requires that we recognize that video game industry - like other communications industries studied by Garnham, Guback, Wasko, Bettig, Frith, Banks, Miege and many others - exists within a capitalist framework. Murdock and Golding discuss this capitalist framework as one which defines a mainstream industry and impacts practices and products in relation to profitability. Thus, the capitalist framework leaves its fingerprints on those areas of video game production that work with the framework as well as those that resist, actively or not, the idea of production motivated by profit. Categories such as 'serious game,' 'indie game,' and 'advergame' all owe their meaning to a relationship to the mainstream, for-profit system of video game production.

Seen through this lens, the structure of the video game industry described first by Dmitri Williams and elaborated on by Aphra Kerr requires considerably more analysis. Divided into software developers, software publishers, retailers, and hardware manufacturers, video games represent a significant cultural industry with its own system of power relationships. It is an industry that evolved from a combination of computer manufacturing, Hollywood film production, and the toy production and distribution but has become something distinct. Part of its logics seek to emulate and extend its complex relationship with Hollywood and with the Western military-industrial complex, both described elsewhere by Nichols. More importantly, it is an industry that produced not just a single technology but a variety technologies which are bounded by the capitalist framework and which embody very specific instances of power distribution both within the industry structure and in ways that ludology and narratology rarely consider.

3. Multiple Commodities for Game Studies

The first obvious implication for video game studies that this points to is that the game software - currently the almost exclusive focus of video game studies - is not the only commodity produced. Indeed, while software may be the most obvious method of conveying meaning - of telling a narrative and of affecting how we play - the role of hardware is just as crucial. Both personal computers and consoles are increasingly being designed as entertainment hubs, capable not just of running

software but also of playing DVDs and CDs and even display aspects of telecommunication. Similarly, personal computers are being designed with increased multi-media capabilities including the ability to record TV programs, to display images, and manage household functions. At the same time, it is in the hardware sector that new ways of bringing gamers together is being tested.

Another example of the significance of the video game hardware sector can be seen in its impact on other media technologies. Sony's PlayStation 3 system features both a new form of computer processor and the use of Blu-Ray optical discs. The Blu-Ray disc format is one of two forms touted to be the format for the next generations of DVDs. The battle over formats resulted in a number of strategic alliances in Hollywood and with major retailers, but ultimately Blue-Ray won out, though the technology's adoption has been slow. In fact, in spite of the inclusion of Blu-Ray technology in its Playstation 3 - and some would say because of it and the cost to consumers - Sony's latest console has lagged behind even its previous console, the Playstation 2, in sales.

The hardware sector also offers a crucial example of the transnational nature of video game production. While most video game hardware and software is sold in three major industrial areas - North America, Western Europe, and Japan - a significant portion of hardware production, particularly memory and graphic chips, is contracted out to other nations including India, China, and Taiwan. Typical analysis looks at the manufacture of chips only in terms of personal computers, where high-end chips are major sellers for video game systems. But they are also crucial for the manufacture of consoles and handheld systems as well. This system of contracting out production makes estimating the cost of the chips involved quite difficult, but the cost is certainly significant.

As the industry has progressed, it has become increasingly common for hardware manufacturers to outsource the creation of consoles and even of CDs and DVDs, and it is used by companies including Microsoft, Sony, nVidia, and Intel, all of which are important in the manufacture of chips for video game consoles and personal computers. In part this has been to decrease labour costs and the desire for round-the-clock production, it is clear it also owes to lax labour and environmental restrictions. Microchip production involves highly toxic procedures, and the impact of their production can be severe. Moreover, by contracting out this production, unionization of workers becomes much more difficult.

It is also worth noting that the role of players themselves hinges on two other commodity relationships: intra-game commodities produced by players (including items and the communities themselves) and extra-game commodities (which might include walk-throughs and game mods). In both cases, the value of the commodity shifts the nature of power within the existing industry structure even as it commodifies the player interaction with a game itself.

4. Labour and Power Relations

The question of labour and video games is a second area that a political economic approach can engage with. The increasing technical capabilities of hardware platforms, particularly consoles, helps to drive the production of new video games. It also has resulted in higher production costs and longer production times required for games. Because the industry is constrained by the two goals of meeting Christmas demand and promoting brand recognition and licensing obligations, there is intense pressure on workers in the video game industry.

Game production may take between 14 months and three years. For Triple A games, the industry equivalent of a blockbuster film, costs are expected to top $10 million for games created for the most recent round of hardware platforms like the XBox 360 and PlayStation 3. Some analysts have even predicted development costs will rise to between $15 and $20 million within the next few years. Such figures aren't unheard of. One estimate suggests that the cost to produce and market Microsoft's *Halo 3* was over $60 million.

Seen as highly valued positions because of the mobility allowed, the creative inputs required, and the relatively high salaries, software labour also demonstrates the problems of information labour. Labour tends to happen on a contractual basis, with periodic gluts. This also leaves many workers without insurance or benefits, which cuts dramatically into workers' wages. Similarly, mobility is restricted as software labour tends to concentrate in particular areas. Ultimately, this has tended to lead, at least in the case of U.S. workers, to a relatively short period of employment, in which workers often leave the industry after seven years for more secure positions.

For hardware, however, the situation looks very different. While the cost to develop a hardware platform can be considerable, they are often treated as loss-leaders in the areas they are sold. But development of the hardware tends to happen in countries where games are much less commonly played, and the environmental cost of production is one of the major externalities for the industry. As Stana Martin has noted, this type of labour tends to be performed particularly by women, representing another particular power dynamic worth being examined further: that of the gendered nature of employment with video gamers. This area needs much more study, as it represents a sort of black box of video game production which has profound impacts.

5. New Questions for the Next Decade

While this study has been able to present only two examples of ways in which thinking about video games and their commodities as embodied power relations, it is apparent that such a tactic raises interesting questions which have not previously been open in the field of game studies. But having demonstrated both the limits of the video game effects in order to insulate their study from concerns about violence and having expanded on how the players might interact with narrative, it seems

crucial that game scholars begin to consider questions of games' broader impact: not just on gamers, but on producers, on industries, the environment, and broader society.

Notes

[1] B. Bates, K. Albright & K. Washington, 'Not Your Plain Old Telephone: New Services and New Impacts', *Communication, Technology and Society*, Hampton Press, Creskill, NJ, 2002, p. 91.
[2] E. Aarseth, 'Computer Game Studies: Year One', *Game Studies*, Vol. 1, 2001, http://www.gamestudies.org/0101/editorial.html.
[3] V. Mosco, 'Introduction: Information in the Pay-Per Society', *The Political Economy of Information*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, WI, p. 1.
[4] V. Mosco, *The Political Economy of Communication*, SAGE, Thousand Oaks, CA, p. 26.

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Part II:

Videogame Cultures

Five Years of ur-Real Identity: A Rhetorical Examination of the History of *World of Warcraft*

Marlin Bates IV

Abstract
November 2009 marked the five-year anniversary of *World of Warcraft*'s launch. It is therefore fitting to examine how the rhetoric of the virtual world has changed over the last five years. This chapter will attempt to detail the arc of identity change in the ur-real worlds contained within the *World of Warcraft* as well as how *World of Warcraft* has had a ripple effect in other MMOs. Furthermore, this chapter will mark the rhetorical space that has not only been created by these instances of identity, but also how that space has been altered through the ensuing years. This chapter will accomplish these goals with a combination of close reading of the websites (both fan-created and Blizzard's) as well as a grounded theory model construction. The chapter will not only examine the current instantiations of the websites, but will also examine the past ten years of data I have collected. This collected data will also be supplemented with data gained through the use of the 'Internet Time Machine'. http://www.archive.org/web/.php.

Key Words: ur-Real, rhetoric, identity, achievements, *World of Warcraft*.

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In 2004, Blizzard Entertainment released a piece of software that was based on a brand name that was already ten years old, not only was the brand not new, but it was also not a new genre of game. Indeed, *World of Warcraft* was just one of many MMORPGs launched in 2004. Additionally, MMORPGs had been around for at least a decade, if not longer.[1] However, *World of Warcraft* had some impressive numbers: it was the most successful PC game up to that time and it was boasting a user base in the millions, not just tens of thousands like its competition, EverQuest II and other MMORPGs. It is now five years later and *World of Warcraft* is still increasing its user base and is approaching its third expansion. So, the question becomes: how has it changed?

When I first envisioned this chapter, I thought I would be able to chart the course of changes in how player-characters represented themselves in *World of Warcraft*. However, in actually reviewing the web pages and data I have accumulated, I began to realize that such a charting is well beyond the scope of a single chapter. Indeed, it is closer to a book-length discussion. In light of that realization, I tried to figure out what major part or parts had changed over the five years of *World of Warcraft* and even the fifteen years of Warcraft in general. I came to the conclusion that the most representative change came in an easy to examine package: achievements. Achievements are found - and have been found -

in other games before *World of Warcraft*, but the use of them in not only in the intended ways as envisioned by Blizzard, but also in the unforeseen practical aspects in gameplay reveal a vein of data that is rich in information. Therefore, this chapter will not seek to examine the peculiarities of game play changes, per se, but it will seek to examine how the introduction of the achievement system has affected and has been affected by the identity creation within it. To begin, this chapter will provide a brief look at what exactly is meant by rhetorical creation of identity in the online world of MMORPGs, then we will look at a sample of the critical theory available to scholars intending to look at online identity creation before, finally, turning that understanding to examine what achievements are, how they have been incorporated into identity creation within the game and outside of the game. Finally, I will examine how this change represents a fundamental shift in identity construction in the ur-real environment.

1. The Artefact

What do I mean by 'achievements'? To be precise, on 14 October 2008 Blizzard released Patch 3.0.2 to the *World of Warcraft* software. Although it primarily had content for the then latest expansion, *Wrath of the Lich King*, the patch also released a system of allowing player-characters to meet certain goals by doing some pre-set activity. The best description of what an achievement is comes from Blizzard itself: *World of Warcraft*'s achievements come in several varieties. Some simply require specific actions to unlock [. . .} Others involve a progress bar and require you to do something several times.[2]

2. Analysis

Player-characters employ the achievement system in three primary ways: as a personal representation of work, as proof of skill, and as glue to cement their corporeal existence with their ur-real existence. The personal representation of work comes in the form of title display, mount display, and gear display.[3] The proof of skill comes in the chat window during gameplay and is also used to gain access to higher level pick up group (PUG) game content. The combination of these two elements result in a more cemented identity.

During gameplay, achievements can be shown to other player-characters in a variety of ways. Blizzard has constructed the software so that the player character may constantly or temporarily display a title from the myriad titles that are able to be earned during gameplay. But how does this signal identity construction? First, as Black tells us, the stylistic token, in this case a title earned through the achievement system, is displayed so that the implied second persona - the other player-characters in *World of Warcraft* - can get a sense of what that player-character values. For example, if a player-character chooses to display 'Ambassador,' then that implies a Player-Character vs. Environment viewpoint that is particularly ascribed to by that player-character. In order to acquire that title, the

player-character needs to raise his or her reputation with his/her faction's home cities. This requires a good deal of PvE gameplay that may or may not be solo. This is opposed to the title 'Battlemaster' that would signify a more PvP or Player-Character versus Player-character type of gameplay. So, the audience of that display takes that in and processes that. To some player-characters, the 'Ambassador' title might be looked on with derision because it signifies a focus on PvE gameplay versus PvP and, of course, vice-versa. Now, we also need to recall that Black tells us that the use of a stylistic token is a 'fallible sign' of the adoption of an ideology, but the player-character can also display additional stylistic tokens to demonstrate their allegiance to a particular ideology, in this case, a method of gameplay. The player-character can use special clothing choices to display additional PvE or PvP allegiances. Indeed, a player-character could demonstrate a PvE title and a PvP armor/clothing item. Moreover, the achievement system awards special mounts for player-characters to use in game. These mounts are unique to that particular achievement and demonstrate a certain prowess. For example, the use of a 'War Bear' signifies that a player-character has successfully invaded the opposing factions cities and killed its NPC leader. This demonstrates a number of things: 1) that the player-character has been in some sort of massive raid group, 2) that the player-character is not above a little PvP action, and 3) that the player-character has made a conscious choice to do these things and *display the result.* It is this last item that is especially important to our discussion. The player-character has not done this out of chance nor does the game play require the character to do so. The only incentive is to have that particular mount so that he/she can use it in game and have other implied auditors see it. If I, as a player-character, decide to achieve this goal, I do so because I want it to be part of my player-character's identity and, by extension, my corporeal identity. I do it because it shows a little bit of who I am and how I am to be perceived as a player-character. Additionally, it demonstrates my identity as a unique individual. Heretofore, player-characters were limited in their choices of stylistic tokens to armor or weapons acquired through gameplay. To be certain, the achievement system also allows that, but the addition of easy-to-see and, some would claim easy to acquire, titles adds a dimension for even the most casual of player-characters. Moreover, armor and weapons signifying high-level achievements could sometimes be purchased via the in-game auction house, thereby diluting the armor or weapon's usefulness as an indicative stylistic token, or to use Black's terminology, to make it a more fallible sign of an adopted ideology. Achievements and their concomitant stylistic tokens are unique not only to the account of the player-character but also to that particular character thereby making them a more sturdy representation of rhetorical identity.

It is that sturdiness that has allowed the use of achievements to be more included into the everyday gameplay. Specifically, the achievement system is being used as an ability check in order to join other player-characters in higher-end

raids or instances. For example, if a group of player-characters wish to attempt the instance, Icecrown Citadel (ICC), and they need more members, they might issue a call on the in-game chat window that reads, 'Need tank for ICC-10, PST to MacRorie, link achievement.' The text simply means, we need the player-character that holds the attention of the monsters in the dungeon for the ten-person raid instance of Icecrown Citadel. Those that wish to join the group should send a private message (a tell) to the Player-Character MacRorie and include an in-game link to an achievements associated with completing ICC. The receiver of the message, MacRorie, will then be able to click on the in-game link and see that the person had completed the achievement and when. It is interesting to note that this practice is so pervasive that someone has developed an add-on that allows player-characters to send 'fake' achievements.[4] The accessibility to endgame content is the result of a growing disenchantment with the hardcore gamers wanting the content to only be accessible to those that have proved their worth.[5] Part of this use comes from what we were discussing earlier about the diluted nature of gear being an indicator of player-character ideology choice. Since it was somewhat easy to pick up high-end gear from the auction house, this was not always useful to judge if a player-character was 'hardcore' enough to be able to do the end-game content. Moreover, the use of the 'gearscore' has been increasing, but the achievement is taken as better proof of ability.[6] With the practical use of achievements now being an everyday occurrence, the mutability of their impact becomes lessened. Indeed, Burke's comment that the mimesis of the practical becomes indistinguishable from the real further support a conclusion that achievements are a less 'fallible' method of judging ideology adoption. Now, one could argue that this, therefore, becomes an incentive for the player-character to accomplish achievements, however, these achievements are somewhat different in that the player-character is still not required by the course of gameplay itself to accomplish these feats. There is a vast array of activities that can be accomplished by player-characters in *World of Warcraft* that does not require end-game content completion. Indeed, I would wager there are many millions of players who have not even attempted end-game content and are very satisfied player-characters. Yet, these achievements still serve as part of the player-character's identity that she chooses to display. In doing so, that player-character has adopted a particular viewpoint on the game and, by extension, on the entire ur-real world in which she resides. It displays an identity that chooses to be part of the more difficult aspects of the game. In earlier work, I might have termed that player-character a 'gamer,' someone who seeks to display mastery of the game itself. I cannot surmise the psychological reasons for such an identity choice, which is beyond my expertise, but I can surmise that it is a conscious rhetorical choice to display that is that she is as a player-character.

What this means is that as the behaviors and achievements compound from a variety of identity instantiations, they become less and less fallible. People begin to use the ur-real as just one more aspect of a now much more *stable* identity. It is

that stability, the relative lack of mutability that becomes so amazing. Rhetorical identity online becomes indivisible from the rhetorical identity in the physical world. These items simply are the next iteration of items we use to display who we are as we go about our daily lives.

3. Conclusions

The past five years of the *World of Warcraft* have seen a number of MMOs and MMORPGs come and go. Some have lasted the test of time; others have made contributions and then left the arena. During the next five years, many other new instances will certainly appear. However, what has fundamentally been altered is how the physical self and the ur-real self are intertwined. *Starcraft II*, for example, will have achievements. These, like their *World of Warcraft* counterparts will have the option of automatically being displayed. The crossover will continue, perhaps to the point where player-characters from *World of Warcraft* will be found in *Starcraft II* or vice versa.[7] But what do these changes mean for the future of online rhetorical identity studies and video game research?

To be sure, the impact of online behavior should be viewed as just as important, and, perhaps, as predictive, as offline behaviors in terms of understanding and deciphering meaning from individuals and groups of rhetors. Although psychological motivations are not only beyond my expertise, but also very far away from the intent of this analysis, I have for a long maintained that there is something there, 'there.' With the changes incorporated over the last five years in *World of Warcraft* and now throughout other MMOs and a wide diversity of games, the 'there' is now 'here.' Games are no longer restricted to the computer or platform on which the main software resides. This means that research into ur-real rhetorical identities and video game research must expand its focus by looking at not only the game and the player-characters within that space, but also examine the milieu that surrounds the player-character and the interstitial spaces of a corporeal and an ur-real life. Additionally, it would seem that the more a player-character is able to reside within that interstitial space, the more he/she will retain a presence within the game and its associated accoutrements.

Notes

[1] MMORPGs (Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games) have ostensibly been around since 1990. For further information, reference M. Bates, 'More Real than Real: The ur-Reality of *World of Warcraft*', *The Computer Culture Reader*, Cambridge Scholars, Cambridge, England, UK, 2009.

[2] Blizzard.com, 'Player Achievements Preview', Retrieved 30 May 2010, http://www.worldofwarcraft.com/wrath/features/gameplay/achievements.xml.

[3] A mount is an in-game object that allows a player-character to move from place to place within *World of Warcraft*. It can be a land-based mount (e.g., a horse) or an air-based mount (e.g., a dragon). Depending on the skill level of the character, the mounts vary in speed.
[4] Glowstik, '0 Solution to Link Achievements', Blizzard Entertainment, Retrieved 12 December 2009, http://forums.worldofwarcraft.com/thread.html?topicId=16137367955&sid=1&pageNo=1.
[5] Messiah, 'WoW ICC PUGable - Fair or Foul?' Ten Ton Hammer, Retrieved 30 May 2010, http://www.tentonhammer.com/wow/editorials/iccapugability.
[6] A gear score is calculated on a number of external websites.
[7] Indeed, with the purchase of the Collector's Edition of *Starcraft II*, the owner receives a code that can be redeemed for an in-game *World of Warcraft* pet.

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SysOp is Dead: Community Evolution and Online Games

Timothy Christopher

Abstract
In the days of dial-up Bulletin Board Systems (BBSs), the System-Operator (SysOp) was responsible for creating and maintaining a specific culture for their members. In effect, the SysOp was considered a host and the members were guests. These small-hosted communities were policed entirely by the SysOp, who had authority to ban any person at any time. The prevalence of public servers in modern online games makes it easy for any player to log in at any time; in the unlikely event that a player is banned, they need only create a new name to log back in. Game developers continue to find new ways to simplify this log-in process, making it easy for all kinds of people to join their online games. As adults in a real-world society, we understand the need to be civilized, but we also understand that not everyone can always get along. Subsequently, we value our ability to control who we interact and play with. At what point does the barrier to entry for online games cease to be technology and become the other players? This chapter explores the evolving nature of social groups in online games, with a particular focus on the changing role of 'hosts' and 'guests.' Topics covered will include the interrelationship between the development of online games and online social spaces, the value of allowing a community to create small sub-communities within itself, how online social spaces and games can continue to learn from each other, and possible future challenges faced by game community members and designers. This chapter will discuss a variety of games, including *Trade Wars 2002*, *Starsiege Tribes*, *Team Fortress 2*, *Left 4 Dead*, *Dungeons and Dragons*, and others.

Key Words: Host, BBS, sysop, multiplayer, community, social behaviour, gamers.

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1. Dungeons and Dragons and Tabletop Game Hosts

Before modems and computer games, there were tabletop games, one of the most well known being *Dungeons and Dragons* (D&D). D&D is one of numerous table top games that requires a Dungeon Master (DM) or Game Master (GM) for the game to work. This means that one person involved does not play the game so much as they run the game, managing the game world while numerous other players try to succeed in said world. The function of a DM tends to reach beyond rules layering and monster managing. The DM is a host to the players. The DM sets and maintains the mood for a gaming group, settles arguments, and may remove troublesome players from the game.

Because of the large amount of control a DM is able to exercise, and the varying type of people who enjoy being a DM, D&D groups very substantially in their play styles and traditions. Some groups are very technical, using gridded maps, miniatures and other means to represent as accurately as possible the game space. Others groups simply place markers on crudely drawn grids to resolve location-based issues. Some D&D groups, called Live Action Role Players, may go so far as to dress like their characters, fashion weapons, and physically play out their game battles. Despite the varied execution techniques, all above are still engaging in the same game. Due to these varying play styles, it can at times be quite difficult for a person who plays a game such as D&D to find a group who plays it the same way.

2. From College Campus to Living Room

During the early development of computers for use on college campuses, enterprising students began to create multi user text adventures that could be played on the campus computer network. These early games, called Multi User Domains, or MUDs, were the children of tabletop games such as Dungeons and Dragons. The games were limited to the campus network, though a few could be played on ARPANet. Students could log into these text based games and help or compete with each other in various adventures. Despite being limited to certain college campuses, these games proved to be quite popular.

As computers became common in homes, so did a hardware peripheral called a modem. These early modems allowed computer users to connect their computers over phone lines. This technology gave rise to the dial in Bulletin Board System (BBS). These were some of the earliest versions of remote electronic social networks. BBS operators, called SysOps, would connect a computer to a phone line and configure BBS software to answer the phone and initiate an electronic connection with the computer dialing in on the other end. These BBSs were initially used as means for communication and software exchange. Since the BBS used dial up phone lines, they were usually local phenomena. As BBSs grew in popularity, so did BBS games. These games were called ‘BBS door games’, or just ‘door games.’

These early door games were an evolved version of the college network MUDs. By using BBS software, and computers equipped with modems, players could sign into door games and compete or cooperate in these new forms of games. Some door games, such as *Trade Wars 2002*, only allowed one player to sign in at a time, similar to taking turns at a board game, others allowed a few players to sign in simultaneously, creating some of the earlier remote multi player games. As these games became increasingly popular, SysOps found themselves spending as much time being game masters for their door games as they did being hosts for the rest of their BBS community.

Inviting friends over to play a game was replaced with giving them your modem's phone number and allowing them to dial in and play one of the games you hosted. Like their predecessor DMs, SysOps now found themselves acting as hosts for their friend's games. The SysOp would at times have to step in to settle disputes, prevent cheating and occasionally ban troublesome players. Because of this the personality of a SysOp and the types of players their friends were determined the mood of a given BBS game. In a game of *Trade Wars* on one BBS the players may exist in a state of perpetual war, focusing on ship to ship battles, performing or defending against piracy, and taking every opportunity to destroy another player's ship. On another BBS the games of *Trade Wars* may tend toward intergalactic business. Players focus on forming corporations, making trade agreements, and building trade stations. Because of the variety in SysOp attitudes, people often were members of numerous BBSs, each BBS community serving a different purpose for the player. One might sign into John's BBS for a competitive game of *Trade Wars*, and later sign into Jeffry's BBS for a laid back round of *Legend of the Red Dragon*. These local BBS communities would often share numerous members.

Around the same time as BBS gaming, network cards were becoming a popular computer hardware option. These cards allowed computers to be physically connected to one another, creating another option for multi-player games, Local Area Network or LAN parties. Like the days before dial up, game players would gather at a host's house to play games. This time players would bring their own computer. Like analogue game parties, LAN parties could vary in the traditions and execution. Some players would gather to play a myriad of games, spending only an hour or two on any given game, other players would gather with the express purpose of playing one game for the duration of the party. Once again, the host would invite a group of like-minded gamers to set a specific mood for the gathering.

3. The Web Brings New Life to Remote Gaming

Modems allowed only two computers to connect at a time, and network cards required that all the gamers be in the same place, but the Internet had neither of these limitations. Games were quickly designed that allowed a player to host a game that upward of 32 other players could connect with at the same time. Not only was the number of player drastically increased, the potential geographical distance became global. Now any gamer could connect with any other gamer, so long as they both had Internet access. Initially games that supported internet play, such as *Star Siege Tribes*, required that one of the game players function as a server for a game. Once created the server would allow up to 32 people to connect and play.

Like the DMs and SysOps of before, the person who hosted a game of *Tribes* could police their server. These games were generally less heavily policed though,

as the more rigid structure of the first person shooter made play styles vary less. That did not mean that the games were chaotic though, if a player were troublesome they could be removed from the game. Also, as games began to rely on the Internet as a means of connection, people who opted to host servers were typically given the option to put passwords on the servers, insuring that uninvited players could not connect.

Tribes was also one of the games that allowed for the players to modify game play, called 'Modding' or 'Mods.' These could be as simple as adding a few new maps, to Mods that created large amounts of new weapons and vehicles. As more players began to modify the game, it became difficult to find server hosts that were playing identical games. This created a large amount of segregation in the game community around Tribes.

Numerous games began to take advantage of Internet gaming. Like *Tribes*, many of these games would have communities that would develop numerous modified versions of the games, these included games such as *Unreal Tournament*, *Mechwarrior 4*, and *Battlefield 1942*. As these and other types of online games became popular, strides were made to make it easier for players to go online. Connecting to the Internet became as easy as a few mouse clicks, and connecting to online games became equally simple. Once these hurtles were dealt with, a new type of obstacle began to surface for gamers, other gamers.

The popularity of modifying games made it difficult for new players to connect and play with others. Even if they were diligent enough to acquire any needed commercially published patches for their games, they would still be faced with the task of either finding a host that was running an unmodified version of the game, or setting up their own server and hoping people would join them. Because of this, communities for these types of online games were splintered.

Eventually game developers and publishers began creating official dedicated servers. These servers were hosted by the companies responsible for making the game, and hosted only non-modified and up to date versions of their games. This insured that players who wanted to play the unmodified games had a place to do so. These servers were often left unattended, giving players a taste of anarchy. The players were given the option to vote to remove a player from a game, but this was only a small amount of control compared to the iron fisted control previously available to SysOps and DMs of old. The other issue that players faced because of these now standardized servers was tyranny of the masses. This meant whatever behavior was deemed acceptable by the majority of game players became standard for everyone. Rather than the many ways one would play a game of *Dungeons and Dragons* or *Trade Wars*, there was only one way to play a game of *Team Fortress 2*. Players who did not find this to their liking had to learn to adapt, or quit.

Some games, such as *Left 4 Dead*, created a compromise. It is possible for players to use official servers, but to also stipulate that they only want to play with friends on their Steam Friends List. This has allowed the player to have some say

about the people they deal with in these online games. The concept of the Steam friends list does have the major issue of friendship being a binary state. This means that a person is on your list or not. You cannot stipulate close friends, coworkers or family for instance. This can lead to much debate over who is appropriate to put on a friends list. The second shortcoming of the friends list is degrees of separation. If a server is 'friend only' that means that any person who is a friend of any player in the game can join that server. Inevitably, a player may start a game with friends, but eventually find they are playing with a friend's coworker's brother, whom they have never met.

4. Massive Online Gaming: Is there a SysOp and does He Care?

Before they were used for multi player games, servers that were owned by game developers were used for massive multilayer online games (MMOGs). These games were an evolution of the early MUDs. Sometimes referred to as 'graphical MUDs,' these MMOGs grew rapidly in popularity. The MMOG that was initially hailed as making MMOGs a widely recognized game was Sony's *Everquest*. *Everquest* (EQ) grew rapidly as internet access became an increasingly common thing. In order to accommodate its large player base, EQ had several different servers.

Each server was designed to host thousands of players simultaneously. In order to prevent too much anarchy however, Sony created different types of servers for different types of players. Initially *Everquest* had two forms of servers, cooperative, or 'care bare' and player versus player, or PvE. This allowed the servers game mechanics to exorcise some control over player behaviour. Cooperative servers were configured so that players were unable to harm each other, whereas PvE servers allowed players to attack and kill each other at will. This allowed the players to easily separate themselves based on their desire to compete or cooperate. Eventually other forms of servers were created. These servers were initially variations on the two main forms. Race War servers, for instance, allowed player to kill each other only if they were playing characters of different races. In time the server types grew in variation to include 'role play' servers. These servers were created for players who wanted to become more invested in the role playing opportunities offed by the EQ game world. As player came to understand the different social structures on each form a new server, they could quickly pick one best suited to their play style.

In time another MMOG, Blizzard's *World of Warcraft*, launched. This game learned from its predecessors and started with several different types of servers to allow for differences in play style. From its launch, WoW consisted of PvP servers, normal (care bare) servers, and Role Play(RP) servers. Where EQ made MMOGs widely recognized, WoW made them widely played. But both MMOGs, and others like them, had to find a way to police their players. In the days of BBSs, policing a hundred players could be a full time job, so the need to police a thousand players

created a new job altogether. EQ, WoW, and other MMOGs came to rely on hired people, called Game Masters (GMs) to police their servers. Where the SysOps of old had a more personal motivation for helping their players, GMs are paid to do so. The players were given the ability to 'petition' a GM for help. How long this took and how much help this would constitute could vary widely from GM to GM. As such the atmosphere of a server was not determined by a host, as with previous online games, but by the general social atmosphere created by the most typical behaviour of players on a given server. The server types however, did provide a step toward finding a social atmosphere a player was more likely to enjoy.

Not all MMOGs have taken the 'different servers for different players' approach. Games such as Cryptic's *Star Trek Online* boast that the entire game takes place on one server. While this is undoubtedly a substantial technical achievement, it may not yield a beneficial social achievement. Like gamers playing non-persistent online games that use official servers, such as the afore mentioned *Team Fortress 2*, players of STO find themselves once again at the mercy of the masses. The lack of server types for an MMOG could make it far more difficult for players to find like minded players, interested in the same gaming experience, not just the same game.

5. Making Friends and Avoiding Enemies: Future Concerns

One of the important and socially useful aspects of games in the past has been the idea of choosing one's friends. Analogue games, early digital games and increasingly fewer modern digital games have allowed for this through a variety of means. The social implications for the gamers are that some may find themselves unable to 'get into' a game, not because of the game itself, but because of the community around the game. While game developers have done a great deal to make games more approachable from the technological standpoint, their tendency to try to homogenize the gaming community is contrary to the age-old ability for gamers to self-segregate. In time, this drive toward homogenization may provide a greater barrier to new gamers then any past limits of technology.

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Social Media Games and the Performance of Self

Cathie LeBlanc

Abstract
Social media sites such as FaceBook have steadily gained in popularity in recent years. These sites present a variety of game opportunities to their users. Many formal games, such as Scrabble, are available free to FaceBook users, for example. Many of the game activities in FaceBook, however, are not formal games because the player cannot 'win.' Instead, many of these activities provide the user with the opportunity to express an identity while engaging in interactive play with others. According to Erving Goffman, every interaction among people involves the performance of self. The performance involves two types of impressions, the impression that a person expresses consciously via verbal symbols to convey information known by all to be attached to those symbols and the impression that a person 'gives off' via all other behaviors. The first impression comprises the traditional, narrow conception of what we call 'communication' while the second involves non-verbal behaviors once thought to be unintentional and unconscious. Of course, we now know that both can involve intentional as well as unintentional communication. Games such as Farmville and Café World provide the user with an opportunity to customize a personalized space that 'gives off' an impression of the identity of the player. Still other game activities involve taking quizzes or answering questions that the player's friends can see and which the player can use to express a particular identity. Although there is a large body of research into the use of online spaces for the performance of race, gender and sexuality, other aspects of identity performance have been largely ignored. Following the uses and gratifications theory, I will argue that social media game players use these games to gratify their need to construct a well-rounded online identity that includes physical attributes, behavioral preferences and a variety of competencies.

Key Words: FaceBook, Farmville, social networking, gender, identity performance.

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1. Introduction

Social media, such as Facebook and MySpace have enjoyed exponential growth in recent years. Millions of people, for example, use Facebook as a means for maintaining contact with friends and family. The popularity of computer games has also increased in recent years, with many people from atypical demographics playing games on social networking sites and on platforms such as the Wii. In this chapter, I will use the uses and gratifications theory to argue that social media

game players use games within the social media platform to gratify their need to construct a particular online identity, to perform a particular self for their audiences.

My long-term interest in developing games and a recent move to Digital Media Studies have led to my current interest in games and play, especially the play of adults. There seems to be a large body of literature on children's play (why and how they play, what their play means and so on) while there has not so much work exploring the play of adults. In this chapter, I will explore games that adults play using social media as a platform and how those games interact with identity expression and experimentation where people 'try on' different identities in the safe environment of the online world. Following the uses and gratifications theory of media use, I will argue that players use games within the social media platform to gratify their need to construct a well-rounded online identity that includes physical attributes, behavioral preferences and a variety of competencies. I will focus on games that involve the customization of online spaces and why a new demographic seems to be especially interested in this type of game. To explore this area, I will discuss three things: 1) uses and gratifications theory;[1] 2) impression management, as articulated by Erving Goffman in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*;[2] and 3) social media and the games people play on those platforms.

2. Uses and Gratifications Theory

The uses and gratifications theory[3] is a theory of media use that focuses on the audience (consumers) of media. Historically, most media theories have asked 'what does media do to people?' They typically see the consumer as a passive recipient of the media, helpless to resist the power of the media messages that wash over them. In contrast, the uses and gratifications theory flips the relationship between media message and consumer around and asks 'what do people do with media?' It focuses why people use media. Unlike many theories, it sees the consumer of media as an active participant in her relationship with the media. Blumler and Katz in 1974 (in perhaps the most famous quote regarding the theory) explained that the theory explores:

> 1) the social and psychological origins of 2) needs, which generate 3) expectations of 4) the mass media or other sources, which lead to 5) differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in 6) need gratifications and 7) other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones.[4]

That is, the theory says that people have needs which generate expectations concerning media which lead to different media uses resulting in gratification of the original needs (or not).

The first question then is: what needs do people try to gratify with their use of media? An early study of media consumers using the uses and gratifications theory, identified four types of needs (in the general population): diversion, personal relationships, personal identity, and surveillance.[5] Subsequent studies have identified additional needs that consumers gratify using media but for these will suffice for the purposes of this chapter. The need for diversion involves a need to escape from the routine of everyday life or to achieve an emotional release. This, for example, is why many people like to watch movies that make them cry. The need for personal relationships includes the need for finding companionship with other people as well as for gaining some sort of social utility via relationships. For example, one might read a book that a friend has recommended in order to provide an opportunity for conversation about that book later. The need for personal identity includes the need for personal reference (that is, consuming media about people like us), reality exploration and value reinforcement. For example, one might listen to Rush Limbaugh's radio show in the United States in order to reinforce one's already conservative values. Finally, the need for surveillance includes the need to gather information or monitor an event. For example, one might watch the local news in order to get information concerning tomorrow's weather.

Over the years, several uses and gratifications studies have examined traditional gamers to identify the needs that are gratified by their game-playing. In general, these studies show traditional games expect that games will result in the gratification of their need for diversion. For example, in 1981, Malone found that gamers report playing games in order to engage in fantasy, to challenge themselves, and to satisfy their curiosity.[6] Similarly, in 2007, Dawson found that gamers expect games to provide entertainment, fun, escape, and relaxation.[7] In other words, gamers from traditional demographics have typically reported that they play games in order to divert themselves in some way.

3. Impression Management

In 1959, Erving Goffman wrote his influential book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*.[8] Goffman introduced the idea of impression management by using the analogy of the theater and actors within the play to explain complex human interactions. Of course, this is not a new analogy. For example, Shakespeare in the 1600's famously said, 'All the world's a stage and the men and women merely players.' But Goffman followed this analogy to its logical conclusions in regards to all of human interaction (communication). In response to Shakespeare, Goffman said, 'All the world is not, of course, a stage, but the crucial ways in which it isn't are not easy to specify.'[9] According to Goffman, each communicator, or actor, in an interaction is engaged in a performance during the interaction. The goal of the performance for each actor is to provide audience with an impression of self that is consistent with the manner in which the actor wants to present herself. That is, the

actor in a communication interaction desires to construct an image that claims a particular personal identity.

Goffman goes on to explain that two types of impressions are involved in any performance, each of which can be expressed either intentionally or unintentionally. First, there is the impression that a person expresses consciously via verbal symbols to convey information known by all to be attached to those symbols. Second, there is the impression that a person 'gives off' via all other behaviors. This includes things like clothing choices, tone of voice, the way in which one chooses to decorate his/her home, and so on. All of these items together communicate something about the identity of the actor to the audience. Therefore, according to Goffman, any communication interaction is concerned with expressing a particular identity. That is, all communication is about performing a particular self.[10]

When Goffman discussed the performance of self, he was primarily discussing communication interactions between two individuals. McQuail, et al. were primarily concerned with the communication between an individual and her mass media choices. Recall that one of the types of needs identified by McQuail, et al. concerned personal identity, which included needs for personal reference, reality exploration, and value reinforcement.[11] To gratify a need for personal reference a consumer might read an autobiography of someone who went to the same college as she did. To gratify a need for reality exploration, a male consumer might play an online game as a woman in order to experience a reality different than the one in which he normally lives. And to gratify a need to have her values reinforced, a consumer might watch a television show that supports the views that she already holds. Each of these activities involves the use of mass media artifacts to create an identity that the individual might perform in interactions with other individuals.

4. Social Media

When we talk about 'social media,' we mean media that allows humans to interact with each other, that is, to be social. In recent years, with the introduction of Web 2.0, social media have enjoyed explosive growth.[12] Web 2.0 allows users to be active producers of content rather than simply consumers. In Web 2.0 terms, social media include blogs, wikis, photo sharing sites, social networking sites and so on. The ease of use and ubiquity of these tools have led many people who never used computers before to go online and become engaged in online life.

The people who have started to use computers because of Web 2.0 fall into non-traditional demographics concerning computer use. In particular, social networking sites have been very popular with women.[13] The non-traditional computer user has needs that she is trying to satisfy with her use of social media and her needs are different than the traditional computer user. Recall that traditional game-players, for example, are primarily playing computer games to gratify a need for diversion. Several recent studies have found that new users of

social networking sites are trying to gratify needs that are different than those that gamers are trying to gratify using games. For example, Sheldon found that *FaceBook* users expect that using the networking site will gratify their needs for maintaining relationships and passing time.[14] In addition, Urista found that social networking users use the sites for staying in touch with friends and family and managing communication.[15] That is, the expectation of users of social networking sites such as *FaceBook* is that media use will result in gratification of their need for maintaining personal relationships (and a little bit of a need for diversion).

Maintaining a relationship between individuals requires that the individuals engage in communication interactions. Recall that Goffman said that all communication interactions involve impression management or what he calls, 'the performance of the self'. Therefore, I argue that, because FB users are focused more on relationship needs rather than individual needs (such as diversion) when they use *FaceBook* (and other networking sites), they use *FaceBook* as a mechanism for creating and performing impressions of a particular identity or a particular self.

5. Social Media and Games

Many Facebook users play games designed for that platform. Many of these games involve owning an online space of some sort and managing a set of resources within that space. For example, *Farmville* and *Farmtown* involve owning and maintaining a farm on which the user plants, nurtures and harvests crops and on which s/he raises farm animals, builds buildings, installs fences and so on. In *Café World* and *Restaurant City*, each user owns and runs a restaurant in which s/he must customize the main character as well as the café itself and decide which foods to purchase and which recipes to make in order to attract customers. Even a simple game like *Parking Wars* involves the customization of a personal, online space because each user can choose from a set of very simple street styles for the street she controls. A recent study indicates that women are driving the trend of social gaming.[16]

What do these games have to do with communication or being social? The user's friends (who are also involved in the game) are able to interact with the user's customized online space. And so, following Goffman, when the user designs her online space, she is communicating with these friends. In other words, she is creating an impression of herself for the benefit of this online audience.

Here are two personal examples to illustrate what I mean. A friend and colleague who is a female PhD in her early 50's (and who is not a typical computer game player) has four farms in *Farmville* (which required her to create four separate *FaceBook* accounts). She told me that she decorates and manages each farm differently, consciously expressing a different part of her identity with each farm. One farm, for example, is decorated all in pink. A second farm is decorated in a southwestern US style. As a communication studies scholar, she is aware that

managing these farms, playing this game, gratifies some need in her. And yet, self-reflection has not yielded an answer to her concerning what the need is that is being gratified.

My second example involves my engagement in a non-game activity on *FaceBook* that nonetheless involves play. The activity involves a meme, which is a unit of cultural ideas, symbols or practices.[17] For example, on *FaceBook*, one type of meme involves a user answering a set of questions about herself and posting those answers so that her friends can read them. Participating in a meme such as this often involves a kind of play and a performance of self. Recently a meme circulated in which the participant was to answer a set of questions using the song titles from a single artist. I chose *The Indigo Girls* as my artist and then spent an hour or so answering questions such as 'If your life were a TV show, what would it be called?' and 'What is the best advice you have to give?' As I answered these questions, I sometimes answered truthfully (but not too revealingly) and I often chose an answer that I thought was funny or clever in order to reveal to my friends that I am funny and clever. In other words, I was carefully playing this 'game' so as to create a particular impression of my self, to perform a particular self for my friends.

Farmville is a fascinating example of a *FaceBook* game. A recent study found that the typical Farmville player is a woman in her 40's, clearly outside the traditional demographic for computer game-players.[18] Why is *Farmville* appealing to this demographic? Remember that *FaceBook* users in general are not primarily using the social networking site for diversion (the typical need gratified by computer games). Instead, they are using the social networking site to maintain their relationships with friends and family. It makes sense, then, that they are probably also playing games expecting their need for relationship maintenance to be gratified. *Farmville* does sometimes meet a need for diversion; my friend said it's relaxing/calming to water her crops, for example. But her hope is that others will visit the farm as well. She gets pleasure from arranging crops in a particular way, owning certain animals, building houses, and so on. That is, there is pleasure for her in creating an impression of her identity, in performing her self (or at least one aspect of herself) for her potential audience, the visitors to her farms.

In conclusion, many users of social media are engaged in playful activities. Some of these activities allow the customization of online spaces. Other activities, such as participation in memes, allow the display of certain behavioral preferences and competencies. These behaviors are what Goffman calls 'the performance of self.' Applying the uses and gratifications theory to the playful activities of social media tells us that users gratify their needs for personal relationship and, following Goffman, personal identity. These needs differ significantly from the needs that gamers from traditional demographics have indicated that they are attempting to gratify when they play a game. The uses and gratifications theory of media use

explains the immense popularity of games such as *Farmville* among middle-aged women.

Notes

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[16] M. Saltzman, '40-Something Women Flock to FaceBook Games', *Toronto Star (Canada)*, March 6, 2010, Toronto, p. E13.
[17] 'Wikipedia: Meme', June 20, 2010, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meme.
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We All Live in a Pokémon World

Aaron Bennett

Abstract
Philosophical theory tends to be well hidden within the contexts of popular culture. In this chapter, I set out to show how Aristotle's Friendship Ethics, as well as Free Market business strategies, can be associated with the success of the Pokémon franchise. To do this, I examine how Pokémon's creator Satoshi Tajiri came up with the idea of the game and how certain ideas of friendship and the drive to succeed play important roles in the Pokémon brand. An examination of these aspects of the world of Pokémon reveals that the themes of friendship and the drive to succeed are formative reasons for its popularity. The question of what it means to be a Pokémon Master is addressed at the end of the chapter in a unique way, pointing to the universal need for human companionship and social interaction. My chapter suggests that Pokémon's underlying purpose is to foster relationships and communication between people. Companionship is shown to be the motivating attraction of the game, an attraction that has left a deep impression on many of my generation. An example of this phenomenon closes the chapter and serves as a thank you to Pokémon for its beneficial influence on society.

Key Words: Pokémon, Aristotle, Free Market, friendship, marketing, video game.

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The year is 1998. I have secretly transported a bowl of Kellogg's Pokémon cereal down into my basement. I know that I am breaking a house rule but I remind myself of my mission. The Pokémon T-shirt I am wearing is starting to smell because I've worn it for a week. I am frantically flipping through the channels. There's something about President Clinton and his friend Miss Lewinsky on all of the news stations. But none of this interests me. It's 9am and I feel reborn. I would achieve my goal no matter the sacrifice. I would become a Pokémon Master. Yet there was a problem with my lofty goal, a problem that plagues me to this day: what does it mean to become a Pokémon Master, and how does one attain it?

The most appealing aspect of the world of Pokémon is its emphasis on relationships. Pokémon's creator Satoshi Tajiri created a game that catered to the human desire for personal interconnections.[1] As a child, young Satoshi would often play outdoors, collecting insects from around his home in Machida, a suburb of Tokyo. Searching for new insects and going on daily adventures with his friends made Satoshi profoundly happy. Unfortunately, this joyous freedom would not last. As Japan became one of the world's most technologically advanced and developed nations, its natural landscape changed. The forests and ponds that once provided hours of enjoyment for Satoshi and his friends started to disappear.

Pokémon was created in compensation for Satoshi's sense that modern society had become detached from his youthful flights of imagination inspired by nature. In a modern world, where imagination is often overshadowed by technology, Satoshi Tajiri brilliantly found a way to stimulate the imagination through technology. I propose that the unique way in which Pokémon is played and how the franchise is marketed, combined with the connections that children are encouraged to make within the world of Pokémon, were inspired by ideas closely related to Free Market principles and Aristotle's views on friendship. Ideas similar to these appear to have contributed to the success of the game, and to have inspired Satoshi Tajiri's creation. Accordingly, becoming a Pokémon Master may have less to do with the world of Pokémon itself, and more with humanity's need for companionship and the drive to succeed.

Aristotle reasoned that through friendship, one could lead a life filled with happiness and correct judgment. Aristotle's stance is that virtue is imperative. In his *Nicomachean Ethics* he argued that through friendship one is able to unite virtue and happiness.[2] Aristotle was the first philosopher credited with citing friendship as a means to live a successful and happy life, and he thought more about the question than any other philosopher before him.[3] According to Aristotle, the chemistry of two like-minded people can be profoundly consequential. Friendship allows for 'eudaimonia,' a Greek word which may be translated, 'happiness or flourishing,' a concept in which both happiness and virtue combine to form an ideal state of fulfilment.

Aristotle's explanation of how friendship contributes to a state of flourishing is somewhat cryptic. He says that a good friend is another version of the self because each person is striving for the same thing: excellence.

> …And if as the virtuous man is to himself, he is to his friend also (for his friends is another self): - if all this be true, as his own being is desirable for each man, so, or almost so, is that of his friend.[4]

The language in the above quotation is subtle. Aristotle equates a friend with oneself and argues that because both you and your friend have the same goals and aspirations in living a successful life, the two of you are one in the same.[5] Growing together in this way is the ideal way to live according to Aristotle because friends share attributes of good character with each other. Friendship is more than just companionship; it is a common bond and commitment to succeed. In the world of Pokémon, the most famous friendship is introduced through the television series and demonstrates that a friendship between a human (or trainer) and his or her Pokémon can lead to a state of happy communion similar to what Aristotle identifies.

The Pokémon trainer and main character of the Pokémon television series, Ash Ketchum, and his best friend Pikachu, are good metaphors for Aristotle's views on friendship. In the first episode Ash sleeps in too late and therefore is unable to select from the standard starter Pokémon Professor Oak provides in the video game. Oak gives Ash his only remaining Pokémon by the name of Pikachu, with the warning that he is a little temperamental. Being basically a large electric rodent, Pikachu electrocutes Ash multiple times throughout the episode. Pikachu is so unwilling to accompany Ash on his Pokémon journey that Ash is forced to drag Pikachu along with him secured by a rope he grips with rubber gloves. In one episode a group of wild Pokémon, jealous that Pikachu has a trainer, starts chasing the two of them. As the wild bird Pokémon are charging at Ash, who is determined to protect Pikachu, the electric mouse gains an immense amount of power and uses an electric shock to turn back the attackers. Such selfless acts cement the friendship between Pikachu and Ash.[6] This event is important because it both demonstrates the commitment each has for the other and establishes a level of equality between them. Throughout the series both characters grow individually as a result of this bond. Their relationship contains a key message: to become a successful Pokémon trainer like Ash, parity in friendship is critical. Aristotle would certainly agree that for personal growth, a reciprocal friendship between equals is the ideal.

The friendship that Ash and Pikachu have for one another is very similar to the friendship that Aristotle describes in his *Nicomachean Ethics.* In it, Aristotle states that there are three ways in which a friendship can be formed: if the prospective friend is either: 1.) good; 2.) useful; or 3.) pleasant. For Aristotle, it is important that both individuals have a similar kind of moral understanding with regard to these traits. A difference in any of these traits between friends will most likely lead to an inequality between the parties.[7] Returning to our Pokémon and trainer duo, it is important to note that Ash and Pikachu only start respecting one another after it is clear that the other is willing to make concessions. Equality between Pokémon and trainer is key. The clear value of Pikachu as an asset is that he is able to fight other Pokémon expertly, and in so doing, Ash is able to fill his Poke'dex (a device that records data on Pokémon) and attain gym badges by defeating others with Pikachu's help. In turn, Ash provides Pikachu with a companion and someone he can turn to for support. As a Pokémon trainer, it is Ash's job to improve Pikachu, making him stronger. Ash at the age of 10, takes on an almost maternal role in raising and nurturing his Pokémon.[8] This makes their friendship a truly symbiotic one, closely related to Aristotelian ideas of friendship. The friendship between these two characters, and the personal flourishing that results from it leads Ash to become a successful Pokémon trainer – well on his way to becoming a Pokémon Master.

Connections made between friends are of particular interest to Aristotle because these interactions provide both pleasure and a sense of purpose.

> And whatever existence means for each class of men, whatever it is for whose sake they value life, in that they wish to occupy themselves with their friends; and so some drink together, others join in athletic exercises and hunting or in the study of philosophy, each class spending their days together in whatever they love most in life; for since they wish to live with their friends, they do and share in those things which give them the sense of living together.[9]

Here Aristotle is saying that once someone is able to find a group of friends with similar interests, it is natural for these people to mingle together and enjoy life in their commonalities. This phenomenon directly parallels the community the Pokémon franchise created for itself. Through the game's social dynamics, a common culture was forged among children who became interested in Pokémon.[10] They started playing together and without realizing it, applied the ideas of friendship and community to real world experiences. Satoshi's goal had been achieved. However, this could not have been done without the brilliant business campaign that Nintendo used to market Pokémon. The video games were very successful and they then spawned a television show, trading card game, a clothing line, and numerous other spin-off products. By harnessing the Free Market, Pokémon forever changed the strategies companies used to sell to children.

John F. Kennedy popularized the phrase 'a rising tide lifts all boats' in a speech in 1963, and the phrase became a mantra in the Free Market community.[11] The idea is that if a certain product improves, then the entire market improves and in the end it is the consumer who benefits. Pokémon used strategies taken from Free Market ideals, which greatly contributed to the success of the franchise. By introducing Pokémon as a global product and by creating innovative marketing strategies, Nintendo turned Satoshi's Pokémon into a true force to be reckoned with in the business world.

The Pokémon franchise in spite of its cute and unimposing image is a true marketing empire. In its first year it generated 5 billion dollars, setting earnings records in several categories. In its relatively short history, it has held the title of the top grossing video game, trading card game, and movie. The official guidebook and the first Pokémon CD became top-ten sellers in their respective categories as well.[12] Because of the success of Pokémon the video game, Nintendo decided to try its hand at other markets and was well rewarded. Buckingham and Green state in their essay on the financial success of Pokémon that Nintendo's Free Market ideas, 'permitted a kind of progression within Pokémon, as children move on from one aspect to the next as they get older; and in this respect, it could be seen to make for longevity that is typically lacking from most such phenomenon.'[13] In this way, Satoshi's ideas of community made for a very successful business model. Because the message of Pokémon aligned with how it was marketed, there were no conflicts

between Satoshi and Nintendo. Similarly, Aristotle's beliefs do not conflict with the basic tenants of the Free Market. Community involvement is important in both belief systems. The combination of the two is what made Pokémon the force that it is today.

The Free Market depends on interdependence and the pursuit of happiness. One of the early pioneers of this idea is the philosopher John Stuart Mill. He believed in the idea of utilitarianism, which states that, 'actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness'.[14] This statement was an early form of what the Free Market is today. The consequence of the Free Market improves the economic environment of the community as a whole. Nintendo applied such ideas when it globalized the Pokémon franchise. General improvement is the result of competition. With fans all over the world buying the countless spin-off products, involvement for the consumer became very much a part of Pokémon's continued success. With the Internet, Pokémon websites started to surface, widening the Pokémon community. Mill states that this idea of involvement is a key to growth in both understanding and in business.[15] Nintendo rigorously applied these fundamental ideas while respecting the ideology of Pokémon's creator. Today, Pokémon continues to bridge technology and social interaction in the Internet age.

Location is no longer a limitation in the world of Pokémon. A service called the GTS or 'Global Trade System,' included in the newest Pokémon games permits players to trade with people all over the world. A well-crafted official website makes this possible, and elements of it resemble the stock market. A three-dimensional globe takes up most of the page and shows trades that are taking place between individuals from countries around the word in real-time. Graphs and statistical data, with the addition of a real-time ticker, make trading Pokémon feel like trading stocks. The more a particular Pokémon is traded, the more it is worth. Value depends on popularity.[16] This amazing new direction that the franchise has taken is in line with both its business model and social philosophy. Children all over the world can now trade and communicate with one another using Pokémon as a vehicle. With new Pokémon games in production and with Nintendo's creative adaptation in other areas, the franchise shows no signs of slowing down. Satoshi Tajiri should be pleased with the results. Aristotle and the pioneers of the Free Market business model would undoubtedly feel the same way.

The year is 2009. I've secretly transported my old *Gameboy* system and Pokémon game into the *Bandersnatch,* my school's coffee house. I know I am risking embarrassment, but I remind myself that as a college freshman, this is inevitable. The *Gameboy* I am using is very old. Its directional buttons are stiff…probably because I used to spend an unhealthy amount of time playing it. Everyone seems to be preoccupied with mindless gossip. But none of this interests me. It's 9pm. Suddenly those at the table next to me start reminiscing about their childhoods. 'Guys do you remember Pokémon? Oh my god man, all my friends

played that game!' They become increasingly excited. 'I had the cards, the games and even a Pokémon book bag!'[17] Happy and relieved, I turn off the *Gameboy* and eavesdrop on their conversations. Like them, I am part of a generation for whom Pokémon became more than just a game or a television show. It consumed our childhoods. Memories of countless hours playing Pokémon fill my head. I still don't know exactly what it means to be a Pokémon master. However, I do know that in my search of becoming one as a child, I made many friends with whom I am still in contact - friends that would please even Aristotle. I also realize that a lot of my money growing up went into Pokémon merchandise, further attesting to the power of the Free Market. Perhaps becoming a Pokémon Master was never really the purpose of the franchise after all. Instead, I believe it was used by Satoshi Tajiri to recreate for today's children the magical sense of social connection he experienced while playing outdoors as a child. For this, I am in his debt.

Notes

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Part III:

Ethics, Controversy and Ideology

Ludology & Theological Ethics: Could Games be Good for the Soul?

Charlene Burns

Abstract
Many believe playing video games can negatively impact beliefs, values, and behaviours. Numerous chapters have been published proclaiming the 'wrongness' of violent video games from religious and philosophical perspectives. Additional negative interpretation has lately been garnered from the cognitive sciences: one study using magnetic resonance imaging showed that neurological centres associated with enhanced aggression and suppressed empathy are activated during play. Should further studies replicate results, the video game industry may face ethical challenges seldom seen by the entertainment industry. At the opposite end are claims that there is no evidence that violent games lead to violence and '[g]ood video games are good for your soul.'[1] Here I examine video game play through the lens of theological ethics as improvisation with an eye toward testing claims of goodness for the soul. Theatrical improvisers are educated in a tradition so thoroughly that they learn to act from habit in ways appropriate to circumstance. This is exactly the goal of theological ethics. Traditional ethics is framed in terms of deciding when to say 'yes' and when 'no'. Theological ethics as improvisation is about creative responding to what confronts us in asking what is possible and where this new challenge fits into God's story. Using Sicart's definition of game ethics as 'a system of rules that creates a game world experienced by a moral agent with creative and participatory capacities …and develops through time the capacity to apply a set of player virtues' I posit that games can be construed as potentially sacred space within which positive moral agents can be nurtured.

Key Words: Ludology, video game ethics, theology, improvisation, narrative ethics.

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Media hype surrounding violence in video games, although not clearly substantiated by research, has led to extreme claims, some of which are the stuff of science fiction. Fear of what he called 'virtual hybridisation' led one American professor of education to testify before a 2000 US Senate committee that games are the 'cultural equivalent of genetic engineering' that uses children as subjects instead of mice and flies.[2] Others claim use of video games leads to acts of aggression and violence. In opposition, video game advocates believe games are no more problematic than any other form of play; some claim these technologies are the very future of education. I suspect that the truth is to be found somewhere to

the left of 'Games are the devil's workshop,' to the right of 'Games are our salvation'.

Much of the negative rhetoric around computers games in the US has been generated by religiously affiliated groups reacting to the violent and sexual content of many games. What I hope to show in this chapter is that this simplistic reactionary stance fails to acknowledge the potential value of games for moral development. I will outline a way of thinking about games that is open to the possibility that at least some types of games might be 'good for the soul'. Following brief discussion of the power of narrative and games as moral objects, I offer an overview of the psychological concept of 'doubling' and of Samuel Well's thesis that theological ethics is best conceptualized as improvisation. These themes will then be integrated in an analysis of the relation between narrative, improvisation, player, and avatar as first steps toward a framework for theological reflection on games that starts from the position that they are potentially sacred spaces within which positive moral agents can be nurtured.

There is debate about whether narrative is an accurate model for examining video games. The argument focuses on the author/game designer perspective and goes something like this: narrative forms of expression are representational, whereas video games are 'simulational'.[3] Narratives are open to interpretation but not manipulation because they are restricted to a fixed sequence of events. In games, the sequence is usually not fixed and some even allow players to determine final goals of play. Although narrative and simulation do offer different rhetorical possibilities for the creator, from the perspective of the gamer, games are filled ripe with narrative possibility. My concern here is on the interplay between narrative and simulation, between imagination and action.

Story engages our capacity for imaginative projection; when we watch videos of other people and even animations, neurons fire 'as if' we are in the story. Storytelling is foundational for human groups as well. Anthropologists tell us that story promotes social cohesiveness. Psychologists tell us that narrative's persuasive and motivational powers arise from our capacity for empathy, and posit that story provides a safe arena within which to rehearse skills necessary for successful social life. Story is society's most powerful means for conveying understandings of right and wrong. In everyday life, narratives can function as exemplars.[4] Narrative provides raw materials for simulation and simulation in the form of active role playing and imitation of exemplars is an important aspect of how we learn through narrative. According to Hebb's Axiom, a widely accepted principle in cognitive science, neurons that repeatedly activate at the same time become functionally linked such that activity in one will facilitate activation of the other. When we consider that the video game player repeatedly engages neural activity involved in both imagination and motion, we come closer to comprehending the potential impact of games. What makes games intriguing as objects for ethical reflection is

the fact that they provide the player with safe opportunities within which to voluntarily explore virtual challenges to one's moral agency.

When trying a new game, most young gamers set aside the instructions, insert the game into the hardware and play away. When faced with challenges not encountered in previous gaming experience, they intuit, probe the virtual environment, and improvise. In theatrical improv the player must negotiate two identities, the real self and the improv self. For the novice at improvisation one of the most difficult lessons to learn is how to deal with the tension between these two identities. The challenge is to give permission to the imagination, to stop censoring the unconscious. Renowned improviser Keith Johnstone says, 'You have to trick [them]… into believing that content isn't important…that they're in no way responsible for what their 'mind' gives them.'[5] Similarly, in the game world, players inhabit two worlds simultaneously: one 'real' and the other virtual. With RPGs things become more complex. James Gee posits RPGs put three, not two, identities at stake. In addition to the real-world and virtual identities, there is the projective identity - player-as-avatar, as both your project and as a projection of yourself, in other words. The projective identity develops in the imaginary space between player and avatar and is shaped by one's own character limitations and the limitations of the game character. This is what makes video games much more powerful than novels and movies.[6] The video game goes beyond imagination to add a degree of actual embodied experience within a virtual world. The player can try on different identities, experience what it 'feels like' to be a different kind of person, even to behave in ways that violate one's 'real world' morality in ways that transcend mere imagination.

RPGs may have bearing on morality for psychological reasons related to the sense of self as it is impacted by experiences encountered via the player's projective identity. Game play provides repeated practice in what psychiatrist Robert Lifton calls 'doubling', 'division of the self into two functioning wholes, so that a part-self acts as an entire self.' Doubling is a normal psychological mechanism that helps us preserve a positive self-image, and we do it in small ways everyday. It can, however, be recruited in 'demonic' ways that allow us to justify immoral behaviors and still believe ourselves to be morally 'good'. The theory was developed to explain actions of physicians in Nazi prison camps of WWII. The doctors unconsciously developed a psychological self appropriate for functioning in two fundamentally different environments which made conflicting psychological and moral demands.[7]

I suggest that the committed player of video games, especially of the RPG type, doubles when engaging the virtual world through her avatar. Others have touched on the idea that computer technologies can lead to development of a 'second self'[8] that behaves in the virtual world differently than one's 'first self' in the real world. Michael Sicart calls this the 'sub-self'- a 'mode of being that takes place in the game' having ethical culpability in relationships established between the 'first

self', fellow gamers, and the game world.[9] Sicart shows that responsibility for ethical content of games is distributed among designers and players; although the narrative content matters, the morality of a game is determined by interplay between game, experience of play, and moral agent.[10] This effort to move the conversation beyond simplistic focus on game content is important, but Sicart and others overlook a vitally important phenomenon of game play by failing to distinguish between avatar and projective identity.

Game play, especially where the player's avatar is a character in an unfolding narrative, recruits doubling more directly than other forms of entertainment. In no other form of play do we find such merging of spectatorship and participation,[11] and therein lies its power as a tool for ethical reflection. The narratives we live by have a direct impact on the doubling process. The content of these narratives defines morality for us, gives us categories according which we label some things good and others evil. In fact, revision of narrative is a powerful method for influencing human behavior through doubling. Nazi leaders, for example, created an environment wherein it was easier for medical personnel to become killers by revising the narrative so that killing became the means for healing German society.[12]

The more conscious we become of doubling, the less likely we are to unconsciously double in destructive ways. In one study, researchers found that simply asking someone to consider how they might respond to a hypothetical morally challenging issue increased likelihood that subjects would behave honestly if faced with the actual situation later. In light of these findings, it is conceivable that the game player's regular exposure to doubling and opportunities to 'try on' alternate moralities as she steps into and out of the game narrative strengthens her capacity to resist doubling in the destructive sense outside the gaming environment. Correlation does not prove a causal relation, but recent US federal crime statistics are suggestive: 90% of American boys and at least 40% of girls are active gamers today. 'Violence' neurons stimulated by games have been firing and wiring together for years, yet statistics show juvenile violent crime at its lowest level in three decades - coincidentally the same period during which the use of video games proliferated.[13]

Thinking of ethics in terms of narrative is about remembering the content of that story which provides coherence, identity, and direction to our communities. Anglican theologian Samuel Wells argues that we learn to be compassionate and ethical through active engagement with the narrative of our religious traditions. Christians are participants in an on-going drama that develops skill in 'faithful improvisation on the Christian tradition.' The metaphor of improvisation captures the Christian desire to remain connected to its traditions without being stuck in the past. The Church is that space within which Christians are trained to be prepared for the many unknown challenges life brings. Faithful response to the unknown requires an alert readiness that comes with extensive preparation. 'When

improvisers are trained to work in the theatre they are schooled in a tradition so thoroughly that they learn to act from habit in ways appropriate to the circumstance. This is exactly the goal of theological ethics.'[14]

A full grasp of the technical language of improvisational acting is not essential here; we can make do with two terms - offer and acceptance. 'Offer' is anything an actor does in invitation to other actors for a response. To accept an offer is to respond in a way that maintains the premises of the offer while adding to it and developing it in a positive direction. Traditional ethics tends to be framed in terms of deciding when to say 'yes' and when 'no'. Theological ethics as improvisation is about creative responding to what confronts us, asking what can be and where this new challenge fits into God's story. The Christian improviser will have learned through on-going rehearsal with her community what it means to be Christian. She will develop of habits of mind which allow her to instinctively evaluate the world's offers, accept them creatively as opportunities to express faith, and respond in ways that keep the Christian story and her part in it alive. Successful improvisation means development of a community shaped by having learned the right habits and practices. Faithful improvising requires deep comprehension of the meaning of the narrative being enacted, an attitude of alertness, and continual engagement with the narrative and other 'players'. A well-rehearsed improvisational group is attuned to one another and the environment, supporting and challenging one another as they respond to the unexpected. Skilled players of MMORPGs will see here a fairly accurate description of the requirements for success in the gaming environment.

Game ethics is 'a system of rules that creates a game world experienced by a moral agent with creative and participatory capacities …and develops through time the capacity to apply a set of player virtues.'[15] Effective theological reflection on video games requires a set of tools for analysis of the moral value not just of particular games but also about the ways in which those games encourage players to apply virtues considered central to the Christian life. Primary moral virtues in the Christian tradition include humility and compassion. Central to achievement of either is the ability to differentiate ego-centric from other-centric motives. In the tradition humility is achieved through self-knowledge; without awareness of the ways we double we cannot achieve genuine self-knowledge. RPGs allow the player, through rehearsal and improvisation, to explore alternate moralities within the safety of the virtual world. As an ethical agent, the player who chooses an 'evil' or immoral avatar is consciously exploring the boundaries of her morality and by choosing to play out the darkness of a 'demonic double', is developing skills that make it far less likely she will respond violently in real life. Good games can be transformative tools that enhance cognitive and perceptual skills, a sense of agency, meaningfulness.[16] Their power is found in the interplay between narrative structure and engagement of players in simulation of behaviours and modes of being via the low threat virtual environment.

Theologically, questions must shift away from simple reaction to content toward more nuanced analysis. Even the goriest of violent games might be rich in opportunities for theological reflection and moral development. Instead of focusing solely on content, we must ask new questions. In what ways does a game encourage psychological doubling? What opportunities are there for reflection on the impact of one's choices within the game environment? How does game design reward or penalize actions considered to be morally good in the non-virtual world? How does the game content challenge stereotypes or reinforce them? Are certain types of games better at bringing moral questions to the foreground than others?

The problem with learning in video game play is the same as in any learning: 'To make good learning moral learning requires that learners are participating in a moral community.'[17] Theologically, developing habits through improvisation in the virtual and real worlds is best done within communities trained in creative moral response. Approached in this way, games perhaps truly can be 'good for the soul.'

Notes

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Racial Whiteness in *Silent Hill*

Ewan Kirkland

Abstract
The *Silent Hill* videogame series is explored as reflecting on constructions and conceptions of racial whiteness. Richard Dyer's work is used to argue a discourse of white ethnicity runs across the series in terms of aesthetics, genre, gameplay and objectives. *Silent Hill*'s American small town location, as depicted in popular culture, reflects many themes of racial whiteness. Neatly lined houses, white picket fences, immaculate lawns, represent a façade of order and civility masking dark primeval forces bubbling beneath the surface. To this spatial whiteness, *Silent Hill* adds an aesthetic whiteness in the ever-present fog permeating its streets and alleyways. Recurring locations might also be understood as imbued with visual, symbolic and racial whiteness. Concerning the games' status as survival horror, Dyer sees the horror genre as resonant with a whiteness defining both adversaries and protagonists. Gameplay draws on whiteness' conceptual association with light, evident in the significance of illumination within the *Silent Hill* series. Evil dimensions in *Silent Hill* are characterised by the absence of light, walls and floors falling away into darkness, suggesting anxieties about the fragility of white civilisation. The flashlight, together with a transistor radio playing nothing but 'white noise', is an essential possession. Goals in *Silent Hill* illustrate connections Dyer observes between racial whiteness and death. Tasks involve players re-arranging morgue gurneys, deciphering notes pinned to hanging corpses, or leaping into their own grave. Games begin with players dreaming of dying, while one ending constructs the entire game as a post-death hallucination. Finally, the problematics of considering the *Silent Hill* series in this way are discussed, given the games' Japanese authorship.

Key Words: Ethnicity, race, *Silent Hill*, whiteness.

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This chapter explores the *Silent Hill* videogame series, produced by the Japanese company Konami, as reflecting on constructions and conceptions of ethnic whiteness. The *Silent Hill* series consists of seven console games, from the Playstation One's *Silent Hill* released in 1999, to *Silent Hill Shattered Memories* on the Wii in 2010. These are action adventure games – or more specifically, survival horror games – in which players direct various Caucasian characters around the streets and houses of the small American town of Silent Hill. This town is shrouded in mist and darkness, is populated by grotesque monsters and other confused Caucasian people. With academic reference to Richard Dyer's *White*,[1] it

will be argued that a discourse of ethnic whiteness runs throughout these games, identifiable in terms of aesthetics, genre, gameplay and objectives.

There is considerable debate concerning the significance of representation and identity in videogames. Characterising the perspectives and respective approaches to understanding videogames as a subject of analysis, the ludological argument is that character and avatar design are irrelevant to core videogame experiences. A frequent example is chess. It is possible to buy versions of the game where all the pieces resemble members of The Simpsons fammily, or *Star Wars* characters, or Marvel superheroes and villains. But, as Jesper Juul points out the basic game is still the same, unaltered by the design of the figures.[2] Avatars are counters on the arcade screen, no more imbued with identity politics than disks on a Go board. Videogames are about spatial progression across blocky landscapes where mimetic representation is replaced by abstract iconography. Videogame protagonists are not characters, James Newman argues, but merely collections of abilities, and to misunderstand them as such is to fail to grasp the principles of this new medium. Consequently, Newman points out, nobody chooses to play *Super Mario Bros* as Princess Peaches, the only female avatar, because of her gender as gender is irrelevant in videogame worlds. Instead, Princess' ability to float through the air is her main, functional distinction from the male avatars, who also have personalised special abilities.[3] Considering the symbiotic relationship between videogame player and avatar, Helen Kennedy struggles to place Lara Croft in a traditional media studies feminist framework. Once the player begin to play as the videogame heroine, Kennedy argues, the figure on the screen becomes a cybernetic extension of their own self, confusing any fixed or stable notion of identity.[4]

Discussions about avatars' tactical functionality, the player/avatar symbiotic relationship, and the insignificance of identity to videogame play underline the difference between videogames and more transparent representational or narrative media forms. Outside of cut-scenes, avatars do not signify gender, race and sexuality in quite the same way as characters do in novels, films and television. Nevertheless, this does not mean that videogames are devoid of such dimensions, but rather that identity politics in videogames is not solely a matter of avatars' mimetic dimensions. Avatars are functional, but that functionality – the actions they perform and facilitate for the player – is not divorced from issues of identity. The fact that it is Princess who floats is not unconnected with her gender; rather the gameplay her avatar performs draws upon traditional constructions of white, upper class women as light, dainty, and graceful. The cyborgian relationship between avatar and player, does not dissolve issues of identity, but rather creates an unstable union between the two; and in a subsequent collaborative work with Jon Dovey, Kennedy asserts the importance of the game apparatus, a dimension they argue is often lost in approaches to game analysis focussing on player agency. Dovey and Kennedy emphasise that while the avatar is dependent on the player's interaction, 'the capabilities, the limits and the possibilities coded into our avatar…

determine the range and form of our activities,'[5] activities which can be understood in identity politics terms, unchanged by the social formation of the individual player. The design of Lara Croft, as Espen Arseth famously stated,[6] may well be irrelevant, but the gameplay circulating her avatar is not, embodying as it does a colonial disposition identified by Barry Atkins[7] – travelling the world, killing natives and plundering treasure – which is compatible with, if not grounded in, the avatar's design as white and upper class. Gameplay and avatar design, in a coherent videogame experience, go hand in hand, and a fit between the identity of the avatar and the identity of the gameplay - in terms of gender, class, sexuality and race - is often central to this process.

Shifting focus from the videogame avatar and its representational dimensions to the processes of gameplay which the avatar facilitates allows an engagement with issues of identity construction and formation more suited to the videogame medium. This engages with the two tier process of identification discussed by Christian Metz in relation to the cinematic apparatus.[8] Applying Metz' distinction, identification with the avatar, the subject of much discussion and debate, represents only secondary identification. This contrasts with primary identification, which includes identification with the game world, the goals and objectives of the game, and the way these objectives are achieved. Clearly the formation of avatars is significant here, and Julian Kücklich[9] suggests that becoming a successful videogame player does involve a form of identification with the avatar. But primary identification takes priority over secondary identification, in some instances, goals and objectives running counter to the identity formation of the avatar. For example, the fact that several first person shooters allow the player to perform as a female character does not diminish the masculinity of gameplay, involving aggressive use of firearms and conquest of space in what Klein et al term the dominant 'military masculinity' of videogame play.[10] Similarity, a game like *My Sims*, where players are offered a male or female avatar, maintains a gameplay evoking traditionally feminine qualities: caring for the town's residents, decorating homes, designing furnishings and fixtures. If such activities are gendered, it might be considered to what extent they are also classed, sexualised and raced.

What follows is a tentative exploration of the various ways in which white ethnicity can be seen as inscribed within the videogame texts of the *Silent Hill* series, not only through the design of the avatars as Caucasian characters, but through the more-significant inscription of white identity into the series' gameplay and game design. White racial identity has received relatively little attention within videogame studies. More commonly authors, such as Jessica Langer in her analysis of race in *World of Warcraft*, focus on characters 'othered' by non-white racial signifiers.[11] In a brief yet rare observation, Christine Ward Gailey touches upon the function of Caucasian ethnicity, noting the extent to which gender stereotypes in games are 'tinged' with racial dimensions: 'Tough' women are rarely blonde; 'princesses' are rarely anything else'[12] - yet this aside is not developed into an

exploration of digital Caucasian identity. Given the problematic theoretical nature of identity in videogames, the distracting presence of the avatar and the integral cybernetic role of the player, it is unsurprising that more visible and critically established identity formations have more often been the focus of videogames scholarship. The ubiquity of white avatars in games, as in much popular culture, renders whiteness invisible. However, an analytic methodology exploring the identity dimensions of videogames through the more diffused operation of gameplay is compatible with an identity formation which, as Dyer writes, 'does not reside in a set of stereotypes so much as in narrative structural positions, rhetorical tropes and habits of perception.'[13] Dyer's argument that 'the viewpoint of a text (how, in its formal organisation, it sees its subject matter) may legitimately be characterised as white'[14] corresponds with an approach to videogame identity analysis concentrating on the structural organisation of the text, rather than the design of the protagonist. As argued in relation to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*,[15] what makes *Silent Hill* such a white text is not just that its main characters are Caucasian people.

Nevertheless, this represents a good starting point for an analysis of the series. All *Silent Hill*'s central protagonists are indeed Caucasian: Harry Mason, James Sunderland, Heather Mason, Henry Townsend, Travis Grady, Alex Shepherd. Throughout the series' seven installments, the only notable non-white characters are Cynthia Velasquez, a sexually suggestive Hispanic woman who dies at the beginning of *Silent Hill 4*, and Deputy Wheeler, a black policemen in *Silent Hill Homecoming* who lives or dies depending on the player's actions. More than just being Caucasian in race, the whiteness of the main characters' skin in cut-scenes is exaggerated by the game's aesthetics. The pale, grainy, bleached-out pallet of the series gives its characters' skin a blanched, sickly, colour-less appearance. This extends to supporting characters such as Lisa Garland, the nurse from *Silent Hill*, Laura, the young girl from *Silent Hill 2*, Claudia, the religious fanatic from *Silent Hill 3*, and Elle Holloway from *Silent Hill Homecoming*, who, as blonde haired blue eyed women, represent the whitest of whiteness within Caucasian discourse, according to Dyer.[16] The games' American small town location, as represented in popular film and television, reflects many themes of racial whiteness. Blue Velvet's Lumbertown, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'s Sunnydale, *Desperate Housewives*' Wysteria Lane, and Silent Hill are characterised by rows of identical houses, white picket fences, immaculate lawns, and nice middle class white folk. To this spatial whiteness, *Silent Hill* adds a visual whiteness in the ever-present mist which shrouds the town's streets and alleyways. Recurring locations across *Silent Hill* - school, church, hospital - might also be understood as imbued with visual, symbolic and racial whiteness, representing education, Christianity, science, institutional authority and sterility. A *mise en scene* of whiteness consequently pervades the series, extenuating the ethnicity of its protagonists through their surroundings. Not only is the small town characterised by the predominance of

Caucasian residents, it embodies themes associated with white narratives, such as repression, secrecy, and guilt about the past. A recurring theme is that the seemingly-idyllic small town represents a façade of order and civility masking dark primeval forces hiding beneath the surface. When James descends the impossible passageway down from the Silent Hill Historical Society, he is uncovering the cruel and violent past, which underpins white American culture, a symbol of white guilt and discomfort at its own history.

The *Silent Hill* games are clearly of the horror genre, one which in the West, Dyer argues, has a particular relationship with white people.[17] As King and Krzywinska observe, survival horror games seek to produce sensations of vulnerability resulting from the comparative weakness and physical limitations of the player-characters.[18] In *Silent Hill* the ethnicity of the characters - whiteness being associated with bodily weakness - facilitates these tensions. The games' monsters are also characterised by a white aesthetic. These include the blanched limbs of *Silent Hill 2*'s mannequins and *Silent Hill Origins*' puppet creatures, the blubbery Carrion and Insane Cancer of *Silent Hill 3*, *Silent Hill Homecoming*'s bleach-skinned Lurkers, Needlers and Schisms. The games' recurring nurses are dressed in white with featureless bandaged faces. While clearly 'othered', it is hard to see the monsters of *Silent Hill* as anything other than racially white, characterised by their bleached and colourless skin. This is not entirely surprising, Dyer observing that 'white people chomping away at white people' is an abiding image within the horror genre.[19] Dyer also writes at length about white people's special relationship with light.[20] Illumination is central to the *Silent Hill* series. Evil dimensions are often characterised by the absence of light, with walls and floors falling away into darkness, suggesting anxieties about the fragility of white civilisation. Moreover, gameplay draws on white people's conceptual association with light through the flashlight, which together with a transistor radio playing nothing but 'white noise', is an essential possession within many games. Protagonists characteristically move through space casting light on their surroundings in an expression of Caucasian ethnicity's affinity with technologies of light and discourses of 'enlightenment'.

Finally, Dyer speaks of whiteness's association with death, a theme that resonates throughout the *Silent Hill* games and the tasks players perform. These involve re-arranging morgue gurneys (*Silent Hill 3*), deciphering notes pinned to hanging corpses (*Silent Hill 2*), or inscribed on the bloody shirt of a dead prisoner (*Silent Hill 4*). In *Silent Hill Homecoming*, the task where Alex must place different emotion-signifying masks on a corpse symbolising his mother reflects white identity's associations with death, surface appearances, and lack of feeling. Several games begin with players dying, only to be resurrected as they wake. One ending to the original *Silent Hill* constructs the entire game as a post-death hallucination, while *Silent Hill Shattered Memories* is ultimately revealed as the imagined adventures of a young girl's dead father. *Silent Hill 2* suggests that many

of the game's characters are dead. This game opens with James staring at his reflection in a toilet mirror, considering the futility of his quest: the search for his dead wife, Mary. James finds a room containing a body resembling his own avatar, while a telling piece of graffiti advises James to just die if he wants to meet Mary, but warning, he may end up going to another place to her. At one point James must jump into his own open grave. The game's characters' pallid complexions, their disorientated behaviour, the ethereal, misty, deserted streets of Silent Hill contribute to an impression, supported by the *Silent Hill* feature film, that the town represents a kind of limbo or afterlife, where dead white people come to relive the pain of their guilty past.

All these elements combined, the *Silent Hill* series might be regarded as a text about racial or ethnic whiteness. However, this reading is problematised by the games' Japanese authorship. Understanding *Silent Hill* in this way may be to impose an inappropriate critical perspective on a series of texts originating, in many significant ways, from a very different ethnic position. Nevertheless, despite their authorship, these are conspicuously American texts. Silent Hill is unambiguously an American town, and the games make reference to much American popular horror and suspense culture – Stephen King, David Lynch, Alfred Hitchcock. It may be that in *Silent Hill* we have a text critically engaging with the meanings of white ethnicity from the distanced perspective afforded by a national culture in which whiteness has not the all-pervading, normalised, invisibility with which it is privileged throughout Western society.

Notes

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[13] Dyer, p. 12.
[14] Ibid., p. 39
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[17] Ibid., p. 210.
[18] G. King & T. Krzywinska, *Tomb Raiders and Space Invaders: Videogame Forms and Contexts*, IB Tauris, London, 2006, p. 216.
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[20] Ibid., Ch3.

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Digital Game Rhetoric: An Investigation of the Political Content in *America's Army* and *Grand Theft Auto IV*

Steven Malliet, Tom Thysen & Karolien Poels

Abstract
This study aims to expose the mechanisms of political rhetoric that are used in two contemporary digital games: the army simulator *America's Army: Special Forces* and the urban crime game *Grand Theft Auto IV*. A two-step method is applied, wherein, first, the programmed aspects of the selected games are investigated by means of traditional text analysis, and, second, the interpretive role of the players is explored by means of a series of in-depth interviews. The results indicate that two different styles of political message construction are at work. Not only do both games defend different political points of view, but the developers also make use of different persuasive techniques and aim for different types of player involvement.

Key Words: Digital game rhetoric, text analysis, moral gaming, political games, player experience.

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1. Introduction

The moral and political characteristics of electronic games have been recurrent themes in research on the impact of digital play. Political and military games have been investigated concerning their political ideology,[1] mechanisms of political persuasion,[2] and impact on players' ethical critical reasoning.[3] Recently, political and moral issues have also been related to commercial games: games that are primarily intended to be entertaining, and that have not explicitly been positioned as political or ideological. Moral concerns have been associated with the impact of shooting games on daily life aggression,[4] the attractions of violent games,[5] and the development of immersive virtual environments.[6]

In this chapter, we will analyse two contemporary games that feature explicit moral and political messages: the military simulation game *America's Army: Special Forces* (U.S. Army, 2002) and the urban crime game *Grand Theft Auto IV* (Rockstar Games, 2008). The investigation focuses on the mechanisms of political rhetoric that are used. The method of a (double) case study was applied, combining in-depth interviews with avid players, document analysis and content analysis. The chapter will be structured in two parts. First, the subject of digital game rhetoric will be theoretically explored. Second, the empirical results will be presented and linked to existing theory on moral and political gaming.

2. Digital Game Rhetoric

A few scholars have contributed to the development of a theory of digital game rhetoric.[7] [8] [9] [10] These investigations draw upon digital game theory, and focus on translating traditional theories of rhetoric and persuasion to the domain of digital game studies. Frasca takes as his starting point Aarseth's triadic model of message creation within cybertexts,[11] and argues that the potential of digital games for political persuasion resides in their capacity as simulations.[12] Players of political games are invited to explore the consequences of political or moral behavior, and to adopt different points of view towards a political opinion or situation. The persuasive result is considered a subtle shift in a person's knowledge of, and attitudes towards a political topic, rather than an explicit change in cognitive or affective dispositions.

Walz elaborates on the question of how this shift can best be effectuated, and argues that the answer is to be found in the processes of identification that take place during game play.[13] An integrated approach is proposed, where persuasion is studied in terms of the relationship between three agents: the game designer, the game, and the player. A number of design principles is developed that should enable the game developer to attract the player's attention, and to enhance the player's willingness to participate in the process of message construction.

Bogost investigates the topic on a micro-level, and develops a theory of procedural rhetoric.[14] Procedural persuasion takes place as a process of interaction between the rules that are defined within a computer system, and the decisions made by the users of this system. Through the interaction with the programmed rules, players are provided the opportunity to effectuate social change, and to explore cultural objects in an active and personalized fashion. Persuasion and rhetoric are investigated in terms of the evaluations players make of the social and political content that has been provided by the game developers.

3. Research Questions

The goal of this study is to investigate the mechanisms of political rhetoric that are used in the games *America's Army: Special Forces* and *Grand Theft Auto IV*. The analysis will focus on specific aspects of the selected games. Following Walz, we will not only analyse content-related aspects, but we will also take into account aspects that relate to the developers and players of the game, in order to assess the process of persuasion that is effectuated through the player-game relationships.

Accordingly, the main research question is divided in two sub-questions:

> **RQ1.** What was the political intent of the developers of the selected games, and how is this intent reflected in the content of the selected games?

RQ2. How do avid players of the selected games respond to this political intent?

Following general theory on persuasion (as applied to digital research by Malliet & Martens[15]) it is expected that players with a low foreknowledge of the political subjects tackled within the selected games, will be more likely to adopt a playing style that is congruent with the intent of the developers. On the other hand, players with a high foreknowledge of the political subjects tackled within the selected games, are expected to be more likely to adopt a playing style that is not congruent with the intent of the developers.

4. Methods

In order to map the relationship between the developers, content and players of the selected games, a multi-method approach is used, where document analysis, content analysis and in-depth interview are combined. The results of these methods will be used to complement each other as well as to highlight different aspects of the political rhetoric that unfold during the playing experience. The main goal of the document analysis was to map the political intent of the developers of the selected games. Official product information was analysed in addition to press releases, game reviews, and discussions on the official web pages of both games. The content analysis was performed according to the method described by Malliet.[16] Within seven categories of game content, the presence of political arguments, opinions, rules or game goals was mapped. This resulted in an inventory of representational and ludological game elements containing moral and/or political arguments. This inventory, finally served as the basis for a series of in-depth interviews carried out with avid players of both games. The sample was divided in four groups:

	Respondents	**Game**	**Interest in international politics**
Group A	R1-R3	America's Army: Special Forces	High
Group B	R4-R7	America's Army: Special Forces	Low
Group C	R8-R10	Grand Theft Auto IV	High
Group D	R11-R14	Grand Theft Auto IV	Low

The results of the analysis will be presented in two phases. First, a mapping will be provided of the intent of the developers of both games, and of specific content areas wherein this intent has been explicitly elaborated. Second, within each of these areas the game play experience will described that results from the dialogue between player, game and developer.

5. Political Intent

America's Army: Special Forces was at the time of the investigation the most recent version of a game that is developed and published by the Army of the United States. The game can best be described as a tactical first person shooting game or a military simulator, featuring highly realistic environments, combat rules and playing strategies. The analysis unveiled six content areas where the developers have explicitly included political and moral messages, representations and interactions. First, significant amounts of background information are provided on a wide range of political subjects, including the motivations of the army and international diplomacy. Second, the game features cut scenes and audiovisual representations of army situations and theoretical reflections. Third, in the elaboration of a wide range of missions, narrative elements are included that relate to the political points of view of the U.S. Army. Fourth, in the rules of combat and tactical possibilities, the norms and morals are reflected that the U.S. Army intends to propagate. Fifth, in the game's symbolism and imagery, a moral orientation is provided towards the goals of the U.S. Army soldiers. And finally, the developers have made extensive use of training tools, where the players are educated about technical and tactical, but also moral and political aspects of contemporary combat situations.

Grand Theft Auto IV is the youngest addition to a series of games that can best be described as hybrid games combining elements of shooting games, driving games, simulation games and crime/adventure games. Document analysis unveiled a political intent that can be described as anti-American in general, and anti-republican in specific. Content analysis resulted in the identification of five areas in which the developers' political intent has been explicitly elaborated. First, the general play mechanism largely influences the moral and political points of view the player encounters while the narrative unfolds. Second, the game features a comprehensive narration, wherein several explicit and implicit political references have been included. Third, many dialogues are made use of, featuring a wide range of characters who regularly bring up political topics of conversation. Fourth, a number of traditional channels of communication have been built into the game, such as radio stations and television statements that provide news programs, and feature announcers who often formulate personal opinions on politics. Fifth, the developers make use of a visual and symbolic imagery, representing Western culture in a specific, often exaggerated and ironic fashion.

6. Player Experiences: *America's Army: Special Forces*

All respondents were very well aware of the fact that *America's Army* is published by the U.S. Army in order to attract potential recruits. Especially respondents from group A (high interest in politics) had a correct view on the specific motivations of the U.S. Army to distribute the game freely to gamers outside of the U.S. Except for one respondent (R5), respondents from group B had not given these issues a lot of thought before the interview took place.

> […] The game tries to make you believe that the war against terror is beautiful, so to say, that it is justified. I think that we, down-to-earth Belgians as we are, will not easily fall for that. (R3)

With respect to the traditional channels of communication included in the game, a difference was observed between instruction films that prove useful in order to enhance one's skills in the games, and cut scenes that were not considered highly relevant in order to proceed through the game. Whereas films in the first category were frequently watched, and considered a useful tutorial, most respondents claimed not having given a lot of attention to films in the second category. Mission briefings were rarely read by the respondents, and if they were it was most often done as a means to kill time while waiting for a new game to start. Respondents also claimed to be only moderately interested in the U.S. Soldier's Creed, which is provided at the start of each new competition. Nevertheless the observation was made that participants had in fact learned a lot about the U.S. Army values and morals – an observation that was explained by the fact that players are not given the opportunity to skip these films, but have to watch them through in order for the game to proceed.

Both players from group A and players from group B claimed having difficulties with the symbolic imagery used throughout the game. Especially the representations that are provided of the Middle East are considered problematic, mainly because they are considered too stereotypical and one-sided. With respect to the representations of the U.S. Army itself, the differences between group A and group B were more outspoken. Although all respondents had a relatively positive image of the U.S. Army, and especially of its soldiers, especially participants from group A appeared very critical towards the U.S. Anti-terrorism policy, and towards the imagery used within the game.

> It's not very realistic. I think it all strongly idealised. You don't see a lot of blood. When someone gets shot, you go see a medic, but you don't see a wound. (R2)

In summary, significant differences were observed between the political intent of the game developers and the experience of the game players. The players' main reasons for enjoyment of the game reside within the tactical possibilities offered in the game rules. Information on the political orientation of the game was mainly accounted for in function of this ludologist motivation of the game players. Although the gap between intent and player experience appeared to exist with all respondents, it was more explicitly formulated with players from group B (low political interest).

7. Player Experiences: *Grand Theft Auto IV*

Due to the hybrid nature of *Grand Theft Auto IV*, players dispose of a wide range of possibilities to contribute to the course of the game. This has a number of important consequences for the ways in which messages are constructed within the game. The choice was made to distinguish between the respondents based upon the adopted playing style, rather than political interest. Following McMahan[17] the distinction was made between playing styles that are defined as *deep play* and playing styles that are defined as *shallow play*. Players in the first category will be referred to as *mission players*, whereas players in the second category will be referred to as *freeroamers.*

With respect to the political and moral content of the game, the second category of players was found to participate more actively in the message construction process in a number of areas. First, whereas the political messages included in the in-game radio and television broadcasts were largely unnoticed by all respondents, it was exclusively players in the freeroamer category who made sporadic mention of certain radio or movie fragments. Second, with respect to the general political message contained in the game's narrative, only respondents in the category of freeroaming players demonstrated an awareness of the developers' anti-republican intent. This included respondents from group C as well as respondents from group D.

> I think it's pretty realistic, but with an ironic touch. They are ridiculing how things go in the U.S. today. GTA did not really change the way I look at these things. I've never been in the U.S. But I do think that things are better in Europe, or, in any case, … where we are politics are better organised. To me, America is not the promised land. (R12)

Finally, concerning the conversations and dialogues provided in the game, the differences between freeroamers and mission players were not so apparent. In addition, the difference between group C and group D appeared not accurate to distinguish between the political involvement of the respondents. Among the participants in the high political interest group, hardly any of the moral or political

content of the game had been recalled. A number of players from the low political interest group, on the other hand, made mention of specific political topics of conversation that they related to their own real-life experiences.

In summary, although the classifications that were made in terms of playing style and political interest did not always prove accurate to explain the respondents' involvement with the political intent of the game, nevertheless a gap was observed between the political elements included in the game, and the player experiences of these elements. Similar to the conclusion drawn with respect to *America's Army*, many political elements of the game went unnoticed by the players. In addition, compared to 'America's Army', the ideological orientation of *Grand Theft Auto IV* has been formulated less explicitly, which results in a significantly lower recall of, or participation in the developers political intent.

8. Conclusions

Conclusions are drawn in two areas. First, following existing literature, the results of this study support the assertion that digital game rhetoric should be considered a process wherein not only the programmed content of a game or the intent of the developers is of importance, but, especially, the constructive role of the player in the process of message creation. In the context of both games that were investigated, large differences were observed between the results of, on the one hand, the document analyses and content analyses, and, on the other hand, the perceptions of the players. Second, although within both games an opposite ideology towards U.S. politics is propagated, most of the political elements went unnoticed to the players. Two aspects accounted for a partial explanation of this observation: the observation that, with most players, play enjoyment predominates over elaborating on the games' moral and political content; and the observation that different playing styles result in different degrees of awareness of the games' political content.

Notes

[1] D. Nieborg, '*America's Army*: More than a Game', *Bridging the Gap: Transforming Knowledge into Action through Gaming and Simulation*, CD-ROM, SAGSAGA, München, 2004.

[2] I. Bogost, *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames,* MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2007.

[3] D. Simkins & C. Steinkuehler, 'Critical Ethical Reasoning and Role-Play', *Games and Culture*, Vol. 3, Nos. 3-4, 2008, pp. 333-355.

[4] E. Konijn, M.N. Bijvank & B.J. Bushman, 'I Wish I Were a Warrior: The Role of Wishful Identification in the Effects of Violent Video Games on Aggression', *Developmental Psychology*, 2007, Vol. 43, No. 4, 2007, pp. 1038-1044.

[5] C. Klimmt, D. Hefner, & P. Vorderer, 'The Video Game Experience as True Identification: A Theory of Enjoyable Alterations of Players' Self-Perception', *Communication Theory*, Vol. 19, No. 4, 2009, pp. 351-373.
[6] M. Sicart, *The Ethics of Computer Games,* MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2009.
[7] G. Frasca, 'Simulation versus Narrative: Introduction to Ludology', *The Video Game Theory Reader,* Routledge, London, 2003, pp. 221-236.
[8] G. Frasca, 'Video Games of the Oppressed: Critical Thinking, Education, Tolerance and other Trivial Issues', *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance, and Game,* MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2004, pp. 85-94.
[9] S.P. Walz, 'Delightful Identification & Persuasion: Towards an Analytical and Applied Rhetoric of Digital Games', *Works and Days, Special Issue: Capitalizing on Play: The Politics of Computer Gaming,* Vol. 22, Nos. 43/44, 2005, pp. 185-200.
[10] Bogost, loc. cit.
[11] E. Aarseth, *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature,* The Johns Hopkins University Press, London, 1997.
[12] Frasca, 'Simulation versus Narrative: Introduction to Ludology'.
[13] Walz, loc. cit.
[14] Bogost, loc. cit.
[15] S. Malliet & H. Martens, 'Persuasive Play: Extending the Elaboration Likelihood Model to a Game Based Learning Context', *Interdisciplinary Models and Tools for Serious Games: Emerging Concepts and Future Directions*', R. Van Eck (ed), IGI Global, Hershey, PA, 2010, pp. 206-225.
[16] S. Malliet, 'Adapting the Principles of Ludology to the Method of Video Game Content Analysis', *Game Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 2007.
[17] A. McMahan, 'Immersion, Engagement, and Presence: A Method for Analyzing 3-D Video Games', *The Video Game Theory Reader*, M.J.P. Wolf & B. Perron (eds), Routledge, London, 2003, pp. 67-86.

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Part IV:

Serious Games and Virtual Worlds

Serious Play: Performance, Death and Theatricality in *Second Life*

Sarah O'Brien

Abstract
In a world where almost all signs are consciously produced (masquerading as the 'natural': e.g. landscape, the body and movement) one could say that the virtual world is always already a theatrical space. And, 'theatre' generally implies that it is not a space to be taken seriously. Griefers could be said to always consciously acknowledge the theatrical status of a virtual world in not taking it 'seriously' (Bakioglu 2009). Griefers therefore frequently employ meta-theatrical tactics which highlight the artificiality of the theatrical host (i.e. the programme itself). However, when friends gathered together in the virtual *World of Warcraft* to mourn the 'real world' death of a loved one only for the event to be brutally attacked by griefers we can see here how an alternative way of 'playing' and interacting with the programme comes sharply into focus. Trying to locate a line between what is 'serious' and affective (moral, lawful, oppressive) and what is ludic play in such a world is therefore an important and continuing venture for recent artists. In this chapter I will examine how, in very different ways, three art works can be seen to be connecting play with its emotional affective and social value. In Second Front's Martyr Sauce (2007) we see how methods of play taken from the practice of griefing can actually serve to 'humanise' the virtual world; a necessary 'griefing [that] helps us to establish morality'.[1] Gazira Babeli's iGods (2009) exemplifies theatrical play as a resistant force distinct from the nihilistic agenda of griefing. Finally, in Jessica Curry and Dan Pinchbeck's The Second Death of Caspar Helendale (2009) we are to consider closely the emotional journey from emotional detachment to emotional dependence where an immersive play takes place. In my analysis of these works I identify and define two ways of playing: immersive play and theatrical play. In distinguishing between these two practices we can begin to locate social significance and emotional value within virtual worlds.

Key Words: *Second Life*, virtual worlds, theatricality, immersion, griefing, play, avatar, performance, objecthood, selfhood.

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1. Immersive Play and Theatrical Play

Most griefers would contend that nothing is serious in the virtual world and therefore these programmes should not be taken seriously.[2] The griefer's engagement with the programme is about proving and reasserting this idea to those sections of the community who do take the world seriously. Taking away the value

judgement implied by the terms 'serious' play and 'non-serious' play these practices can simply be seen to be two separate strategies of play: immersive play and theatrical play. Historically in art and theatre these two forms of representation are not new Michael Fried (1980); Josette Féral (2002). But it is important to distinguish between the two kinds of play in this context so that we can separate the form of engagement from that of the agenda.

Immersive play promotes a singular version of an authentic reality, often with clear rules of engagement, etiquette and objectives – having some kind of valued objective (or reason for being) is very important towards supporting its authentic status (i.e. more than just a social chat room). Examples of immersive play are rife throughout *Second Life*, especially in the spiritual realm: graveyards, churches, monasteries, Zen and other spiritual spaces of contemplation. Immersive practice gives the participant the feeling of entering into another world, a world that momentarily suspends the real world in which the computer terminal sits.

Theatrical play, on the other hand, is seen to exist only because it has an audience. Theatricality is essentially temporal and social and '[…] primarily concerned with the actual circumstances in which the beholder encounters the work'.[3] The representational acts involved in theatricality (following Josette Féral and Michael Fried) draw attention to its essentially intersubjective status, revelling in the fact that it's whole reason for being is that it is there to be seen and experienced in-the-moment of the viewing. Theatrical play therefore self-consciously draws attention to its status as a function of representation – 'showing' rather than 'being'. In this sense, *Second Life* can be seen to be always already theatrical but it is immersive that practice conceals this. In the context of Fine Art, theatricality, for Michael Fried, signifies emptiness (in the sense of being morally void), deception and superficiality.[4] Theatricality distances the viewer – the subject – from the work – the object – and therefore the object is all that we are left with. Put in this way Fried saw theatrical practices (in this case Minimalist Art) as 'griefing' modern art. Although Fried offers a very useful and thorough definition of theatricality he presents it as having an entirely negative effect, which is widely contested in both art and performance studies.

It is theatrical play that usually gets the charge of griefing as it threatens the authenticity of immersive play. But upon analysing some other forms of theatrical practice in *Second Life* we can see how theatrical play is not always immoral, void or superficial and its threat to authenticity can have good reason. Some immersive practices can be found to continue oppressive cultures that began in the real world, and in suspending the real world, the participant may lack their usual critical eye on such practices. Both theatrical and immersive play can support oppressive cultures and sub-cultures and conceal hidden agendas. I suggest here, however, that it is only theatrical play that can resist or reveal their processes. Theatrical practice in *Second Life* has the ability to prompt residents into contemplating how they value the world and what they value in it.

Martyr Sauce, an event organised in *Second Life* by the performance group Second Front, re-frames and thus re-values the act of grieving as well as prompting participants to consider how their practices limit the potential for the sociality that *Second Life* has. *iGods* prompts residents to contemplate their personal attachment to the objects in *Second Life*. And, *The Second Death of Caspar Helendale* offers a theatrical journey from disaffectedness of the Second Life programme (avatar as object) to immersion and emotional attachment (avatar as a face of selfhood).

2. Second Front's Martyr Sauce

Bakioglu claims that griefers in *Second Life* tend to rebel against any endeavour by others to take the world 'seriously'.[5] This includes both commercially serious and emotionally serious endeavours. Bakioglu also draws attention to a divides between two groups, claiming that one group see themselves as superior to another group because they didn't have a sim and were therefore not paying money to 'troll'.

This is an interesting comment: it is as if money alone (rather than time) supports some authentic level of commitment. For residents in second Life this may well be true. Paying money into the programme, perhaps to buy a sim (an island of your own upon which you can build) means that you have a higher status in the programme/social world. Bakioglu describes griefing as a subculture, and as with all subcultures, there is always a resistance to hegemony. From judging the practices of a lot of griefers however, I would say that it is less a resistance to hegemony than it is a form of bullying and nihilism. Grievers always have an autocratic agenda which they exert over others who are not part of that group. And it seems that the only reason (a reason which is sometimes disguised by some moral agenda) for grievers to do this is to empower themselves in this world. It seems then, that the griefers take the game very seriously.

According to Mulligan and Patrovsky, griefing is defined as 'purposefully engaging in activities to disrupt the gaming experience of other players'.[6] Following this, Martyr Sauce, an event by a group of participants called Second Front, can initially be seen to be an act of griefing. Second Front teleported to an island where the social rules were simply to 'protect your avatar and kill all other avatars'. Second Front were there to 'protest for peace': they tried to reason with the other avatars and if that failed they would shoot them with flowers before getting brutally shot themselves. They would then be logged out of the programme only to log in again a few moments later.

Second Front do appear to be putting forward the suggestion that the social rules of this island are limiting the *Second Life* programme to that of a game. But interestingly they put this idea forward by reversing the usual power relation of the griefer, putting themselves in the subordinate position.

Here, Second Front can be seen to be employing the tactics of griefing, but without the autocratic intention. It is for this reason I would say that Martyr Sauce

is not griefing – but it is an example of how theatrical play can work to actually authenticate the social value of the programme. The work can be seen as an attempt to humanise (through humour) inhumane practices by highlighting agency and choice, and a shared a shared cultural memory of the West (in this case, of the far left movements in the 60s and 70s). By humanising this space Second Front are demanding that we engage with the programme at a deeper level of emotional commitment. It seems that Second Front believe that there is a more authentic way of engaging with Second Life.

3. iGods as Resistance to Immersive Play

In *Second Life* the most popular practices dominating the state of play can be seen to be that of the fulfilment of individualist consumer desire, played out in an obsession with buying avatar clothing, skins and brands, bodies and even commoditised gestures, all of which, serve to raise the status of the resident in certain social circles; a practice continued from the real world:

> [T]he romantic quest for individual originality through self expression or self realisation motivates the aesthetic creativity of modern pleasure seekers in the sphere of consumption, even if they no longer recognise this disposition as a vital source of their lifestyle projects, their interest in fashion, their every day consumption and so on.[7]

Such purchases continue this 'romantic quest for individual originality' and as '[n]otions of 'self,' volition, or agency [...] *seem* to compose the look and action of the avatars'[8] then in *Second Life* it is this quest that drives the acts purchasing skins and designer clothing. But note here that Case asserts that these notions of self '*seem'* to connect to the 'look' of the avatar. For Case, there is no connection – the fact that they 'seem' to connect is the lure of e-commerce:

> [the production of avatars and spaces designed for their use is actually driven by a profit, not a performative motive. The avatar's are not perceived as masks for user's performances, but as lures to entice people to remain online in the space of e-commerce.[...] The internet will become a unified topology for avatars, which can then move from site to site, hopefully shopping with greater ease. [....] These regulations understand the vital link to be between the avatar and the user's bank account, not the user's processes of social and psychic identification. [...] The link could also contain data concerning the user's [...] history of her online purchases. The user's identity then is composed of patterns of consumerism.[9]

So the thing represented by your avatar is not yourself but your online purchasing history and your account. This is of course one view, but it is a view that is not articulated through the immersive play of self in *Second Life*, and therefore is probably not a view that has been considered by many participants of the programme who spend hours on their appearance.

iGods was a work by Gazira Babeli which formed part of the Doppelganger exhibition at Second Life's National Portrait Gallery, Canberra. *iGods* can be seen to intervene in this immersive play of self. As residents walk into the Ancient Greek inspired dome they find their avatar surrounded by seven 'statues' of Gazira Babeli's avatar moving between poses. If you get closer to one of them it partly clones your avatar; what it is wearing, its body shape and its poses.

As with all theatrical practice, *iGods* encourages us to look *at* the virtual apparatus – rather than through it. So although the act invites us to take a look at 'ourselves'; we are actually encouraged to do the opposite – we do not look at the subject, we look at the object. *iGods* made me feel self conscious about making these purchasing decisions; I somehow felt held to account for thinking that they might represent me in some way. I noticed how, in looking at my objects, I saw the history of my own purchasing journey in *Second Life*. My avatar no longer seemed to represent me but instead, echoing Case, represented my purchasing habits. I'm not suggesting here that every participant arrives at this view but that *iGods* does put a distance between the self and the avatar in way that entices the viewer to look critically at his or her relationship with it.

4. Caspar Helendale: The Death of an Author

One thing that this interpretation of *iGods* does depend upon is for the participants to have been engaged in *Second Life* for some time, long enough to have developed a personal attachment to their avatar. Cloning the default avatar (that participants are given immediately after joining) probably would not have had the same effect. *The Second Death of Caspar Helendale* puts a frame around this process of immersion and asks: What is it to emotionally connect in *Second Life*? And how can we judge the value of that emotional connection?

The Second Death of Caspar Helendale was performed in November 2009 in both *Second Life* and formed part of a real world performance at the Royal Opera House (*Firsts* 09), UK. In the in-world performance we see the avatar, Caspar Helendale (operated by Dan Pinchbeck in the real world) conduct a virtual vigil for his own funeral inside a mausoleum. In the real world, and played live through *Second Life*, a band performs a requiem mass next to the computer terminals and a large screen showing the in-world vigil. The mass was dedicated to all lost avatars and to 'reflect on the nature of mortality in *Second Life*'.[10]

Initially it would seem that to create 'death' and all of its trappings and rituals in *Second Life* would be an immersive act as death substantiates life in retrospect. However, although this 'death' was presented as a real one in the virtual world, the

event was presented alongside its expression in the real world: theatricality presents two worlds equally, urging us to question the nature of each. Caspar is presented as an avatar only, distinct from the user participant, Pinchbeck. At many times throughout the vigil Caspar talks as if he were at the mercy of his 'user', yet at the same time we watch Pinchbeck type the words he speaks. Who is at the mercy of who? Pinchbeck can only express himself through the predesigned programme and event represented by his avatar. Reading through the book of remembrance[11] it is clear that Pinchbeck and Caspar bleed into one another. It is only through this theatrical display that we can see how Caspar is a unique expression of Pinchbeck's personality within these circumstances, and it is this expression that is being put to death and not a meaningless object.

An emotional connection can only take place if we identify with and have empathy for others and ourselves (as appearing) within this environment. This occurs with immersive play but immersion often makes the user forget that this world is one constructed by real people – or at least suspend this knowledge. The more one accepts the autonomy of this world the more they are said to forget about the possible intentions of the programmer. Caspar's narration that runs theatrically alongside this world draws our attention to the 'underlying decision, agenda, skill' behind all that is seen:

> [...] why do we find the mountains near the beach? Because of any genuine geography of course not, but memories of a holiday or tv show or something *sic.*[12]

Caspar unveils another connection between user participant and the programme to the one suggested by Case, which 'humanises' or rather re-frames the sacred space into one of the social and cultural memory. Theatrical play is a resistant activity, resistant to immersion but anti immersion does not entail a resistance to the programme. Through theatrical play, *The Second Death of Caspar Helendale* examines agency, drawing out the social significance and emotional value of a virtual world.

Notes

[1] M.T. Meadows, *I, Avatar: The Culture and Consequences of Having a Second Life*, New Riders, CA, 2008, p. 78.
[2] B. Bakioglu, 'Spectacular Interventions in Second Life: Goon Culture, Griefing, and Disruption in Virtual Spaces', *Journal of Virtual Worlds Research*, Vol. 1. No. 3, p. 5.
[3] M. Fried, 'Art and Objecthood', *Art and Objecthood*, University of Chicago Press, 1998, p. 153.
[4] Ibid., pp. 148-172.

[5] Bakioglu, loc. cit.
[6] J. Mulligan & B. Patrovsky, *Developing Online Games: An Insider's Guide*, New Riders, Indianapolis, 2003, p. 250.
[7] J.A. Kotarba, 'Consuming Authenticity: A Paradoxical Dynamic in Contemporary Capitalism', *Authenticity in Culture, Self and Society*, Ashgate, Farnham, 2009, p. 180.
[8] S.E. Case, *Performing Science and the Virtual*, Routledge, New York, 2007, p. 200. Emphasis added.
[9] Ibid., pp. 200-201.
[10] E-marketing material for *The Second Death of Caspar Helendale.* http://2ndlive.org/ projects/ps4.php, Accessed 28/05/10.
[11] The book of remembrance was 'Written over the months preceding [Caspar's] deletion, it includes the full text of the service plus additional psychogeographical musings on second deaths in general; the inherent commodification of the virtually deceased; the re-appropriation of terms in virtual worlds; and personal commentary upon his rapidly impending demise.' J. Curry & D. Pinchbeck, E-Marketing Material for *The Second Death of Caspar Helendale, Phoenix Scratch in SL Commission #4*, Exeter, Phoenix (UK), 2 December 2008, http://2ndlive.org/projects/ps4.php, Accessed 28/05/10.
[12] Ibid.

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Gamespace as Knowledge Space

Daniel Riha

Abstract:
Conceptually, the gamespace might be understood as a virtual knowledge space. Strauss and Fleischman define knowledge space as 'architectural space furnished with data', where the user is not only understood as the protagonist, but also 'the producer of knowledge through interaction.'[1] The interactive 3-D space then might be experienced through perception of 3-D space with the exploration of data and production of knowledge through active experience. The interactive knowledge space might declare the characteristics of a diagrammatical project. Fuchs remarks that Benjamin's dialectics of configuration in the diagrammatic systems and the possibility of getting lost within the system might be understood as the typical attributes of the gameplay. Fuchs studied the manner in which videogames might be considered useful for knowledge representation and recognizes alike the importance of deconstruction (reconfiguration). This chapter will discuss the role of reconfiguration as the substance for knowledge communication/production during interactive behaviour in the virtual 3-D environment and its validity for serious gaming.

Key Words: Serious videogames, knowledge space, gamespace, virtual architecture, image theory.

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1. Text as Medium of Knowledge Transfer

In the terms of text, videogames are mostly studied from the *narratology* point of view as static objects of inquiry. This position has been for many years under critique from *ludologists*, who emphasize the need to study videogames as a dynamic process of interactions. Louchart and Aylett state that '*a process approach* to narrative, based on character interaction (among them the user) would be more suitable and appropriate.'[2] Aarseth understands 'narrativism' as 'the notion that everything is a story, and that story-telling is our primary, perhaps only, mode of understanding our cognitive perspective on the world.'[3] He introduced the new concept '*ergodic literature*' defined as 'open, dynamic texts where the reader must perform specific actions to generate a literary sequence, which may vary for every reading.'[4] As well Kücklich identifies the narrative of interactive fiction and videogames as being *virtual* until it is actualised by the user.

According to Friedman, videogames 'reveal their own constructedness to a much greater extent than more traditional texts.'[5] Because videogames can be re-played until all built-in content has been discovered, Raessens proposes describing this process as 'deconstruction'. This term, coined by Derrida, for Raessens refers

to the method of interpretation that aims to 'bring to the foreground those elements that operate under the surface, but break through cracks in the text to disrupt its superficial functioning.'[6]

2. Diagrams as Operational Images for Knowledge Production

We may trace the line of argumentation and research that uncovers the potential of 'visual turn' for humanities in the work of many researchers around the globe. For Krämer, the base of *the operational image* is constituted in a confidence that everything essential might be visually displayed. Dirmoser emphasizes the scope of visual display to embrace the verbally uncovered statements and includes the space-oriented representational approaches to the forms that shall move the operational image research forward from 'statischen/kristallinen Ordnungsmuster' to the 'dynamischen mustern'.[7] Bogen and Thürlemann understand operational images as: 'das Dritte neben Bild und Text, da die Eigenschaften der Diagramme quer zum Text-Bild-Binom lägen und sich nicht als Mischform von Bild und Text bestimmen ließen.'[8]

Drucker states that visual images have always served diverse epistemological functions to provide information through graphical means (as images), but additionally through their specific visual features (texture, syntax, colour and other characteristics). She defines '*graphesis*' as the field of knowledge production 'embodied in visual expressions' and that envelops 'the exposition and description of the principles for structuring knowledge through graphical form.'[9] Graphesis is, according to Drucker, concerned with 'the creation of methods of interpretation that are generative and iterative, capable of producing new knowledge through the aesthetic provocation of graphical expressions.'[10]

Drucker argues that the graphic schema creates syntactic structures within which semantic values can be assigned and maintained, wherein we can read the organizing syntax of these graphic structures. She explains graphical structures as vehicles for rhetorical arguments: 'Every graphic representation is a rhetorical device. Every presentation structures arguments – it doesn't 'reveal' facts in all their purity through the fallible, flawed system of graphical expressions.'[11]

Following Jessop, we may define a map as 'a chart, plan or diagram' that emphasizes its role as a means of graphical representation. Conventional maps used in humanities research generally display knowledge that is already known. Jessop transforms the original definition, promoting its general applicability to the humanities with: 'a diagram or collection of data showing the spatial distribution of something or the relative positions of its components.'[12] He proposes the study of spatial distributions and relationships that should serve for *dynamic mapping in the humanities*, because such maps will enable humanities researchers to switch towards visualization of new knowledge, revealing information that was not known before.

Drucker states that information graphics shall function as 'the expression of procedures for generating knowledge through the act of visualization and ways of displaying knowledge embodied in visual imagery.'[13]

3. 3-D Virtual Images as Knowledge Spaces

Conceptually, the interactive 3-D environment might be understood as a virtual knowledge space.

Strauss and Fleischman define knowledge space as 'architectural space furnished with data', where the user is not understood only as the protagonist, but also 'the producer of knowledge through interaction.'[14] The interactive 3-D space then might be experienced through perception of 3-D space with the exploration of data and production of knowledge through active experience.

Author understands the virtual knowledge space as a concept not limited to architecture or the cityscape, but more broadly as a virtual scientific laboratory.

Fuchs studied the manner in which interactive 3-D environments might be considered useful for knowledge representation and comes to a very similar stand on the role of deconstruction/reconfiguration as understood by Raessens and others. Fuchs uncovers interactive 3-D as a medium in which *de-categorisation* and *re-classification* may be positively implemented. According to Fuchs, the user always navigates his/hers authentic way and therefore channels his/hers individual pathways, or activities described by Fuchs as 're-contextualisation'[15] of the experience.

Fuchs considers the process of active movement in virtual space to be 'the key mechanism for creating *a semantic structure* that is neither linear nor hierarchical.'[16] He also emphasizes offering the user free movement as 'an important feature that allows for individually shaped *relational networks* inside a complex field of knowledge'.[17]

Varano, Truchot and Bignon recently proposed new ways of 3-D navigation useful for knowledge transfer. The user not only explores the 3-D environment, but also concurrently creates *a memory map* of the explored environment. In the application, the user takes the topographical path, where 'the data on the information route are reinvested in the *knowledge points* where the learner transforms the information into knowledge.'[18] The knowledge point structures the path in sequences and the successive sequences define *a quest*. Such *cognitive pathways* help the user 'as motivation mechanisms that help to avoid cognitive overload.'[19] The memory map as a support for different multimedia representations found during 3-D exploration is archived in *a multimedia notebook*. They propose 3-D navigation as an organized system 'allowing the constant reinvestment of the information into data and then knowledge.'[20]

The concept of memory map provides a major benefit to knowledge space research, recognized as *continuous validation of the knowledge construction*.

According to Hann, access to the scholarly process that informed the knowledge space design shall be required. She argues that in revealing the methodological process, the user as well as the scholar shall be 'able to independently assess the researcher's conclusions, allowing the research to be recognised as a valid and reliable contribution.'[21] Hann introduced the concept called '*piercing of the skin*' where the layers of information might be exposed below the surface: 'Information that documents the path, from the conceptual sourced material, to an interpreted three-dimensional environment.'[22] She recommends offering sufficient amount of metadata in a variety of different forms.

4. Reconfiguration as Major Media-Specific Element of 3-D IKS

Virtual 3-D environment or 3-D image embodies unique features differentiating 3-D media from text, 2-D image or the film.

The primary difference of 3-D image as opposed to other media forms involves the notion of interactivity. The ludologist Raessens defines interactivity as 'the possibility for the player to take up the role of narrator and influence the course of events and actions, possibly as a character in the plot.'[23] He further elaborates a more precise alternative to the term *interactivity* in order to characterize not only the specific identifiers of interactive 3-D environments, but also the media culture that flourishes around them: the concept of '*participation*'.

He considers participation as consisting of three domains: '*interpretation* (deconstruction is understood as a specific form of interpretation), the domain of the *reconfiguration* of existing game elements, and the domain of the *construction* of new game elements.'[24]

Aarseth observes that the interpretive function is important for all texts including videogames: 'If all the decisions a reader makes about a text concern its meaning, then there is only one user function involved, here called interpretation.'[25]

But, if we want to identify the seminal difference between text and interactive 3-D for knowledge communication/production then the category of *reconfiguration* seems to have the highest analytical potential. We may accept the term of reconfiguration as the outstanding media-specific element of interactive virtual imagery.

Raessens declares reconfiguration as the relationship between a player and the virtual environment that is, in this context, more complex than 'the different forms of interpretation' that is part of cultural studies. Raessens defines reconfiguration as 'the actualisation of something that is virtually, in the sense of potentially, already available as one of the options, created by the developer of the computer game.'[26] He differentiates between two types of reconfiguration: firstly, 'reconfiguration exists in the exploration of the unknown, in the computer game represented worlds' and secondly, 'when a player in this process of exploration is

invited to give form to these worlds in an active way by selecting one of the many preprogrammed possibilities in a computer game.'[27]

This has been captured in a similar way by Joyce: 'reconfiguration enables the user to control the transformation of a body of information to meet its needs and interests'[28] and such transformation shall 'include a capability to create, change, and recover particular encounters with the body of knowledge, maintaining these encounters as versions of the material'[29] and these 'encounters … are versions of what they are becoming, a structure for what does not yet exist.'[30]

Joyce or Raessens or are not the only game research experts who accent the role of reconfiguration. Both, the defenders of narrativist and ludologist approaches to videogame research support the thesis of the importance of user participation/reconfiguration.

As mentioned in the part 3.1, Louchart and Aylett, Montfort and Kücklich emphasize the role of application-user interaction. Ludologist Eskelinen states 'the dominant user function in literature, theater and film is interpretative, but in games it is […] configurative.'[31] For Moulthrop, the idea of configuration becomes 'a way of conceptualizing the participatory and co-creative practices which new media demand of their users.'[32] Laurel notices the specificity of videogame medium as 'machine[s] naturally suited for representing things that you could see, control, and play with. Its interesting potential lays not in its ability to perform calculations but in its capacity to represent action in which humans could participate.'[33] Narrativist approach supporter Murray identifies the nature of interactive media as 'well suited to gaming because it is procedural (generating behaviour based on rules) and participatory (allowing the player as well as creator to move things around).'[34] She identifies the videogame structure, the puzzle, as a contest between the reader/player and the author/game-designer. From designer's point of view as well, the concept of interaction seems to be of critical importance. Hunicke, LeBlanc, and Zubek proposed Mechanics Dynamics Aesthetics (MDA) model of game design, where the 'aesthetics' or experience of a game is produced by the player's interaction with 'dynamics', which are in turn produced by the designer's construction of mechanics (or rules) whose emergent behavior produce those dynamics.[35]

In the interactive 3-D environments, the user constructs meaning through his or hers actions. Although, Price et al, defend an approach to the study of interactive 3-D environments based on semiotics, their approach is based on a similar foundation with the concept of reconfiguration. In the interactive 3-D environment, signs are 'provided by static meshes, textures, sound, music, animations and other assets.'[36] These authors point to the fact that the use of such signs does not create *a semiotic system*, because the user operates the signs and creates meaning that might 'extend beyond the artist's project.'[37] These signs additionally 'gain their semiotic value from their inter-relationships.'[38] This establishes for Price et al. *a semiotic system* as the user interacts with the 3-D environment. Further, they reveal a

differentiating characteristic of interactive 3-D in relation to text as 'a process of discovering meaning which is not expressed in a language based on a grammar, but through a semiotic system.'[39]

They alert readers to crucial fact that while 'on the one hand, the game designer develops the semiotic game stratum, on the other, in game-play, this is deconstructed by the player who must learn the semiotics step by step, and perhaps even challenge it.'[40] The term *challenge* corresponds here to a category of construction mention above. A semiotic system is then realised when the user 'has learned the rules and feels confident to play the game *for its own sake*.'[41] The user does not simply experience fun. He/she turns this experience into '*Significant Fun*'.[42]

5. Conclusion

As there is currently no uniform methodology for coding this knowledge into the interactive 3-D environment, therefore author's research focus on a major challenge in adapting computer gaming to the professional academic production of cultural knowledge. On the other hand, even in the case of perfectly-coded knowledge space, the design job has not been fully accomplished until we learn about the reconfiguration manners of users, so the major operation of this 3-D interactive knowledge space will be in 'reconfiguration'.

The major research question here is to investigate the possible modalities for coding and reconfiguring knowledge in such interactive 3-D environments.

Notes

[1] W. Strauss & M. Fleischmann, 'Aesthetics of Knowledge Space', *14th International Symposium on Electronic Art*, ISEA 2008, p. 1.
[2] S. Louchart & R. Aylett, 'Towards a Narrative Theory of Virtual Reality', *Virtual Reality*, Vol. 7, No. 1, Springer, London, 2004, p. 13.
[3] E. Aarseth, *Cybertext: Perspective on Ergodic Literature*, The John Hopkins University Press, 1997, http://www.hf.uib.no/cybertext/default.html.
[4] Ibid.
[5] J. Raessens, 'Computer Games as Participatory Media Culture', *Handbook of Computer Game Studies*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, 2005, p. 376.
[6] Ibid.
[7] G. Dirmoser, 'Im Spannungsfeld diagrammatischer & graphematischer Ansätze', Beitrag zum Workshop *´Diagramm und Diagrammatik´*, FU Berlin, 29.-30.10. 2009, Available at: http://gerhard_dirmoser.public1.linz.at/FU_Beitrag_Dirmoser_V8_FU.pdf.
[8] Ibid.
[9] J. Drucker, *Graphesis: Visual Knowledge Production and Representation*, 2003, p. 3. Available from: http://www.noraproject.org/reading.php.

[10] Ibid., p. 33.
[11] Ibid., p. 18.
[12] M. Jessop, 'Dynamic Maps in Humanities Computing', *Human IT*, 8.3, 2006, p. 69.
[13] Drucker, op. cit., p. 25.
[14] Strauss & Fleischmann, op. cit., p. 1.
[15] M. Fuchs, 'Spielräume als Wissensräume', *Kunstforum. Kunst und Spiel I.* Bd. 176, June - August 2005, pp. 56-68.
[16] M. Fuchs, 'Digital Tudor', *Proceedings of EVA 2009 Conference*, London 6-8 July 2009, p. 62.
[17] Ibid.
[18] S. Varano, T. Truchot & J-C. Bignon, 'Ludic and Didactic Paths in a Cultural Heritage Building', *eCAADe 09 Conference,* 2009, p. 2.
[19] Ibid., p. 2.
[20] Ibid., p. 6.
[21] R. Hann, 'Visualized Arguments', *Proceedings of EVA 2009 Conference*, London 6-8 July 2009, p. 116.
[22] Ibid., p. 117.
[23] Raessens, op. cit., p. 374.
[24] Raessens, op. cit., p. 380.
[25] Cited in Raessens, op. cit., p. 380.
[26] Raessens, op. cit., p. 381.
[27] Raessens, op. cit., p. 380.
[28] Cited in Raessens, op. cit., p. 381.
[29] Cited in Raessens, op. cit., p. 381.
[30] Cited in Raessens, op. cit., p. 381.
[31] Cited in Kücklich, op. cit., p. 1.
[32] Cited in J. Dovey & H.W. Kennedy, op. cit., p. 151.
[33] Cited in Raessens, op. cit., p. 381.
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[37] Ibid., p. 250.
[38] Ibid., p. 250.
[39] Ibid., p. 251.
[40] Ibid., p. 259.
[41] Ibid., p. 259.
[42] Ibid.

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Not-So-Serious Games: Digital Education through Entertainment Game Design

Monica Evans

Abstract
Despite their growing sophistication and an increased acceptance by educators, there is still a considerable stigma attached to educational games. For players, educational games are often assumed to be boring, clunky, and 'no fun'; for many educators, these same games are still mistrusted on educational grounds, as the actual teaching process is often hidden in the underlying game system. While many educational games are built on a solid structure of educational theory, few include the emotional engagement and complexity of interaction expected of commercial entertainment games. Currently, educational games have difficulty not only attracting and retaining players, but in imparting educational content in meaningful, measurable ways. The best practices of entertainment games are rarely directly applied to educational content, leading to underwhelming or uninspiring efforts that cannot compete with either big-budget triple-A titles or innovative independent games. This chapter discusses ways to adapt entertainment game structures, practices, and methodologies to educational game development in order to more effectively engage learners without diminishing the quality and presentation of the educational content. As a case study, this chapter also explores the use of these best practices in the development and assessment of the Digital Calculus Coach, an online, modular educational game that teaches introductory calculus concepts to students at the university level.

Key Words: Computer games, educational games, game-based learning, game design, game development, engagement, user motivation, instructional design.

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1. Educational Games

In the last few years, there has been a marked increase in the amount of research interest in educational game design. Where digital games were once seen as a source of competition for students' time and attention, many researchers and educators are now arguing for games' potential as viable teaching tools, and in some cases, as the future of education. A great deal of work on the subject has been published, from the uses of commercial entertainment games as teaching tools[1] to studies on games, cognition, and learning,[2] to play as a primary concern for educators.[3] There are fewer studies, however, that explore specific design practices for the development of games intended primarily for educational purposes, particularly at the university or adult level.

On the other hand, there are an increasing number of texts on design principles for entertainment games, published both by academics and by working industry designers that delineate exactly how the structures, rules, and systems of the medium may be used to create engaging experiences for the user.[4] Many current educational games have strong foundations in pedagogy, educational psychology and instructional design, but few include the emotional engagement and complexity of interaction expected of commercial entertainment games, and fewer still can compete with the production values, budget and team sizes of triple-A game companies. Among today's tech-savvy students, the stigma of edutainment still exists, and educational games are often assumed to be boring, clunky, and 'no fun'. Likewise, many educators mistrust these same games from an educational standpoint, as the as the actual teaching process is often hidden in the underlying game system. To attract and retain players, and to be effective teaching tools for educators, educational games must adopt the complexity and depth of engagement of commercial games, while maintaining the highest standards of pedagogy. This chapter suggests that educational games can adapt the structures, practices, and methodologies of current entertainment-based games in successful ways, and discusses some of the current best practices of entertainment games that are most adaptable to learning content, as well a design framework for creating engaging game mechanics that impart meaningful and assessable learning content.

2. The Magic Bullet Problem

One of the most common problems faced by educational game designers is the lack of gaming literacy on the part of educators, who are often not only the content experts but part of the target demographic of the game. Currently there seem to be two prevailing myths: that all games are essentially equivalent, and that simply changing the content of a popular entertainment game to the desired educational content will make for a successful and engaging learning experience. As to the first, the differences between a real-time strategy game, a platforming puzzle game, and a first-person shooter may be self-evident to a game designer, but are understandably quite unclear to someone who does not play digital games. Exposing educators to the wide variety of games that exist, from the *Grand Theft Auto* series to *Farmville*, is often an effective solution, and as games become more mainstream, this particular issue may become less common.

The second misconception is more difficult to correct. There are a wide variety of game structures and mechanics, as there are a wide variety of learning styles and academic fields, and not all game types are appropriate or effective for a particular educational experience. The desire on the part of many educational institutions to harness the power of games to engage and attract students can also lead to false comparisons, in that educational games are seen as potentially as popular and revolutionary as the few blockbuster commercial games, but are rarely if ever given an equivalent amount of production cost, time, and talent, not to mention the

ten or twenty years that many companies have had to develop an audience for their particular franchise. The challenge for educational game designers is to confront this 'magic bullet' problem: that games can be powerful tools for learning but cannot be an instant solution to the numerous problems faced by educational systems, and that the primary task of an educational game designer is to discover or create the most appropriate game systems and spaces for the learning content in question.

There are three important factors to add to this discussion. First, as discussed by both educational games scholar James Paul Gee[5] and game designer Raph Koster,[6] games still suffer from the 'Problem of Content': that the obvious or surface-level content of a game is not necessarily reflective of the learning that occurs while playing the game. This can often cause difficulty with educators, in that while a game ostensibly about orcs and elves may be designed to teach principles of micro-economics, the fantasy-based setting and visuals of such a game may make it difficult to bring into a classroom – even if those visuals are part of the attraction of the game to students. Secondly, every game is an educational experience, in that at the most basic level a player must learn how to play the game in order to succeed at it. As educational game design studio Filament Games notes, the question is not that games are teaching, but in whether what they teach has real-world value.[7] Lastly, the growing interest in educational games sometimes leads to a desire for games in every aspect of teaching. As games scholar Jesse Schell has pointed out, educational games are likely most successful when they are presented not as complete educational experiences but as tools to be used by both teachers and students. Schell also points out that the systemic nature of games makes them particularly suited for lessons that focus on facts, problem solving, and systems of relationships, as well as those that explore insights or promote curiosity, and that games may be less suited for less interactive kinds of learning.[8]

3. Best Practices of Entertainment Games

Previously, I explored seven best practices of entertainment games and how they might be adapted to educational content.[9] Of these best practices – metaphor, visualization, content as mechanic, self-assessment, achievement, repetition, and multi-linear play – the two that are most pertinent to creating educationally-focused game mechanics are metaphor and content as mechanic. It is important to note that engagement is not listed as a best practice, but is rather the desired result of these best practices, as in the entertainment game industry.

One of the most vital skills a game designer brings to a project is the ability to translate the complexities of human existence into systems that a computer can interpret and understand. The game design is in many ways a metaphor for aspects of the real world: in particular, the systems of life, death, experience, combat, movement, exploration, and ownership are among the most common in games, and can easily be understood in real world terms without being direct translations. A hit

point system, for example, has little in common with actual measures of health or life span, but functions coherently in the game world. This design practice is difficult for systems that we have few concrete rules for, don't fully understand, or describe in shades of grey, such as ethics, love, religion, poetry and philosophy. For educational games, the application of metaphor is a powerful tool for creating games based around, for example, the workings of the human circulatory system, Chinese language and literacy, economic supply and demand, and systems of cultural differences.

In current educational game development, the learning content and the gaming content are too often separated. If gameplay is presented as a carrot-on-a-stick or a reward for succeeding at the learning content, not only is immersion broken, but the learning content appears to players as an impediment to gameplay, not as engaging in and of itself. Likewise, a game that places too much emphasis on entertainment and too little on educational content runs the risk of appealing to students at the expense of a meaningful learning experience. The difficulty here lies in the desire to balance educational content with gameplay, when in fact a more useful practice is to structure the learning content as the core mechanic of the game: to make what the player *does* the same as what the player *learns*. This is the core idea behind content as mechanic: that a player's game experience is tied most directly to the actions that player takes, far more so than the visuals or surface-level content. Games have often been defined as a series of interesting choices,[10] and for educational games those choices must best reflect the choices and thought processes made by learners when they are immersed in that educational content.

4. Adapting Educational Content to Game Mechanics

The task of adapting current entertainment-based game mechanics into learning content is a daunting one. In our work on game research projects, including the Digital Calculus Coach, we have determined a five-step design process that has helped us create educational content-based game mechanics, and is perhaps the beginnings of a design framework for more engaging educational games. It is assumed that the nature and scope of the educational content to be taught through gaming has been decided, and that the content is of a university or adult level, although this design process could easily be applied to learning content for children and adolescents.

Initially, the designers must determine two things: what about the content is the most fun, compelling, engaging, or meaningful to those people that choose to go into the field; and what about the content is the most active or interactive in nature, and therefore potentially the area best taught through gaming. Determining the fun and active aspects of the learning content requires a great deal of discussion between game designers and as wide a variety of content experts as possible, and should make up the bulk of the first phase of design.

The next step is to determine what current game mechanics, genres, systems, or design structures are the most similar to the learning content. Highly sophisticated, innovative, and engaging game mechanics are currently being created in the commercial and independent games industries, primarily because player engagement is so critical to a game's success. Once the similarities have been explored, the designers should then look at how those mechanics might be adapted or transformed into the learning content. The goal is for the player's in-game interactions and thought processes to be directly educational, as well as engaging on their own merits. Occasionally, the designers may feel that no game mechanics or structures currently exist that are similar enough to the learning content to be useful. In this case, the design team should return to the active and fun areas of the learning content to determine if new mechanics might be constructed around those aspects.

Lastly, the ways in which the learning content is currently taught should be examined, both to determine what areas of the content might be best served by the creation of an educational game, and to make sure that the game as designed will be directly useful for educators and students, either in or out of the classroom.

5. Case Study: The Digital Calculus Coach

During the development of the Digital Calculus Coach, our design team used the above five-step process to create game mechanics that would teach the concepts and problem-solving strategies of first-semester calculus in an entertaining way. First, we interviewed calculus professors, teaching assistants, students, tutors, and high school teachers, and discovered that those people who self-identified as mathematicians described calculus as beautiful and elegant. Their enjoyment came from the understanding and manipulation of the language of mathematics. Those people that were struggling with calculus (often the students) or had struggled with it initially (often the tutors) said that their greatest enjoyment came from mastering a concept that had previously been impossible, and that being able to consistently solve problems successfully – particularly a large number of short problems in a row – was very satisfying.

We then determined that the most active parts of calculus were in the manipulation of equations when problem solving, and in mental gymnastics when struggling to understand concept. Of the existing game mechanics and genres, these interactions seemed similar to mechanics in two areas: the repetitive interactions in casual puzzle games, and the complex conceptual puzzles of classic adventure games.

In adapting these general mechanics to the specific content, we discovered that the whole of calculus cannot be described with a single set of game mechanics, but rather that each kind of problem involved a specific kind of problem solving. Our solution was to create a puzzle-based platforming game framework that tied together a series of short mini-games, each with a different core mechanic,

exploring a different kind of calculus concept or problem-solving technique. Our mechanic for teaching how to solve a limit problem using tables, for example, is very different than the strategy-based mechanics used to help players practice short, easily memorized limit problems. This modular game framework also allows the player to personalize their experience by focusing on particular areas, such as practicing a certain kind of problem in preparation for a test.

Lastly, we looked at how calculus is currently being taught at the university level in the United States, and found that there are numerous areas where a digital, self-paced, self-assessing game might be useful. In particular, the lack of individualized instruction and the high drop/fail/withdraw rates of university students in calculus courses led us to believe that a calculus game was not only possible, but potentially necessary.

6. Conclusions and Future Research

During our work with the Digital Calculus Coach, we determined that it is possible to adapt entertainment game practices for educational games, and that even something as seemingly complex and difficult as calculus can be made engaging without the loss of mathematical rigor. Future work will include adapting these best practices and this five-step design process to other kinds of educational games, particularly those that are intended to inspire thought in complex gray areas, such as the ethics of genetic engineering and human augmentation. It is my hope that these projects and others like them will start to explore the potential of educational games to be as engaging and sophisticated as their commercial counterparts, and that they will help to create more effective forms of learning for an increasingly digital generation of students and teachers.

Special thanks to the numerous students and faculty who have worked on the Digital Calculus Coach project since its inception in August 2009.

Notes

[1] C. Steinkuehler, 'Massively Multiplayer Online Games as an Educational Technology: An Outline for Research', *Educational Technology*, Vol. 48, January 2008.

[2] D. Bavelier & C.S. Green, 'Video Game-Based Learning: There is more than Meets the Eye', *Frontiers in Neuroscience Special Issue on Augmented Cognition*, Vol. 3, 2009, p. 109.

[3] S. Barab, M. Gresalfi, & A. Arici, 'Transformational Play: Why Educators should Care about Games', *Educational Leadership*, Vol. 67, January 2009, pp. 76-80.

[4] The best of these texts include R. Koster, *A Theory of Fun for Game Design* (2005), Salen and Zimmerman, *Rules of Play* (2003); and J. Schell, *The Art of Game Design: A Book of Lenses* (2008).

[5] R. Koster, 2005.
[6] J.P. Gee, *What Video Games Have to Teach Us about Learning and Literacy*, Palgrave McMillin, New York, 2003, pp. 19-22.
[7] M. Stone, D. Norton & D. White, *Filament Games: About Us,* Viewed on 25 July 2010, http://www.filamentgames.com/about.
[8] J. Schell, p. 445.
[9] M. Evans, 'I'd Rather be Playing Calculus: Adapting Entertainment Game Structures for Educational Games', *Handbook of Research on Improving Learning and Motivation through Educational Games: Multi-Disciplinary Approaches*, P. Felicia (ed), IGI Global, 2010.
[10] Usually attributed to game designer Sid Meier.

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Avatars in Stasis? Projections of the Self in Literature, Film and Videogames

Harrison Gish

Abstract
The avatar, as both a critical term in videogame scholarship and a functional concept in contemporary videogame culture, appears increasingly diffuse and unspecific. As the term avatar has gained cultural recognition, it has simultaneously witnessed a broadening of meaning that deflates its critical potential. In recent scholarly discourse, the individualized denizens of *World of Warcraft*, minimally modifiable characters such as the ubiquitous Mario, and non-visual networked representations of users, have all been discussed as avatars, their unique qualities and important differences left unspecified. The goal of this chapter is to construct an analytic matrix that productively differentiates multiple iterations of avatars, drawing upon the representations of avatars in foundational cyberpunk literature and high concept science fiction cinema to do so. The focus on interfaces and databases within these fixed narrative forms allow for an approach to the videogame avatar that recognizes the limitations technology and design place on self-representation in digital games and the virtual worlds constructed therein.

Key Words: Avatars, cyberpunk literature, databases, interfaces, science fiction cinema, videogames, virtual worlds.

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Upon his re-entry into the virtual world of *The Matrix*, Neo, played by the seemingly always awe-struck Keanu Reeves, is baffled by his own appearance.[1] As a digital surrogate that differs from his real world operator, an avatar, Neo is unprepared to find himself sporting an elegant haircut and stylish clothing, in stark contrast to the buzz cut and dishevelled rags he wears in the film's post-apocalyptic dystopian future. To assuage his confusion, Laurence Fishburne's Morpheus informs his prodigy that Neo now embodies 'the mental projection of [his] digital self.' However, as Neo continually returns to, and begins to master and eventually reprogram, the virtual world in which he was previously enslaved, his performative abilities rapidly exceed mental projection alone. A database of pre-constructed micro-programs and digital objects increasingly appear at his disposal. These virtual manifestations of software continually restructure Neo's avatar through a feedback loop that tips the power relation between Neo and the Matrix in favor of the avatar and his real-world operator.

In his discussion of videogames as 'action-based' media, Alexander Galloway states that videogame 'play is a symbolic action for larger issues in culture. It is the expression of structure.'[2] To this I would add that avatars, whose construction

gameplay increasingly necessitates, embody an expressive structuring of the self informed and limited by both game technology and design. Avatars epitomize the digitally constructed self-projections social media and digital games currently emphasize, as the boundaries between these two distinctions continue to collapse.

In the present moment, avatars experience a tripartite cultural encoding. Firstly, dominant cultural texts, specifically high concept Hollywood blockbusters and literary bestsellers foreground representations of the avatar that initially appear exceedingly incredible, depicting immersive states promised but never realized by virtual reality over a decade ago. Secondly, players recode themselves on an individual level when constructing avatars, each virtual manifestation emphasizing the singular nature of avatar creation. Finally, avatars are quite literally coded, existing as software programs bound by the technical limitations of the designed virtual spaces within which they operate.

With avatars represented in literature and cinema and avatar construction required in numerous games, a dynamic multimedia network becomes apparent. An avatar potential, envisioned in science fiction film and foundational cyberpunk literature, specifically Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash*, is increasingly evident in the games we encounter everyday.[3] The fixed avatars of page and screen and the played avatars of digital games are in dialogue with one another. Though fixed, cinematic and literary avatars inform avatar play in games, and are therefore not static in contemporary media culture. Indeed, these avatar representations provide a useful rubric with which to examine the digital avatar's appearance and development in videogame history. Interfaces, databases, and the play of embodied action and expressive language structure the avatars represented in *Snow Crash*, *The Matrix*, and James Cameron's recent *Avatar*.[4] In contemporary games, the interfaces and databases available to the player in the design of the individual game entwine with the technical capacity and interactive possibilities of the work in question. The avatars of MUDs differ vastly from the avatars present in single-player games such as *Skate 2*, which in turn differ from the avatars in MMORPGs such as *World of Warcraft*.[5] Each can be understood as a unique confluence of the interfaces that allow for avatar construction and the databases available during this modification process, a continual activity frequently altered by the player's progress within the game world.

Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash*, published in 1992, specifically intones the wide swath the avatar cuts within the digital virtual environment. As Stephenson describes, an avatar is

> A piece of software ... an audiovisual [body] that people use to communicate ... Your avatar can look any way you want it to, up to the limitations of your equipment. If you're ugly, you can make your avatar beautiful. If you've just gotten out of bed, your

> avatar can still be wearing beautiful clothes ... You can look like a gorilla or a dragon or a giant talking penis in the Metaverse.[6]

The main character of Stephenson's novel, aptly named Hiro, operates an avatar that looks exactly like he does, due to Hiro's programming skill. Other avatars Hiro encounters range from 'custom avatars' written for their operators by other programmers to 'off-the-shelf-avatars,' generic pre-designed representations, to those rendered through 'Construction Sets,' 'customized models' assembled from pre-packaged 'miscellaneous parts.'[7]

Evident in Stephenson's eloquent description of the Metaverse's denizens is the broad range of avatar potentiality. For programmers, avatar design becomes a highly individual, personal activity, limited only by one's own programming prowess. Every individuated element of a single avatar can attain both an aesthetic presence and a decisive functionality unattainable to those with less powerful interfaces, less detailed databases, or weaker programming skills. Stephenson's Metaverse, populated with black-and-white, 'run-of-the-mill' avatars controlled by 'persons who are accessing the Metaverse through cheap public terminals' as well as 'wild-looking abstracts' programmed by 'hackers who are hoping [others] will notice their talent,' is wholly inclusive.[8] Unlike the standardized avatars evident in the restrictive design of contemporary games, avatars in Stephenson's virtual world are limited only by access and proficiency, specifically access to necessary hardware components and software programs and proficiency in combining such elements into a cohesive whole. Stephenson's definition of the avatar demonstrates the importance of a connection between an individual virtual self-projection and a single user of the system, more so than the individuated nature of the projection itself. In Stephenson's Metaverse, pre-constructed avatars resemble other pre-constructed avatars, though each is individuated through the actions of the operator within the virtual world, operators who differ vastly outside the virtual sphere.

As Emily Apter notes, 'The avatars of *Snow Crash* have spawned endless contemporary offspring at the nexus of film, literature [and] game culture.'[9] One of these progeny is undoubtedly the avatar Neo in *The Matrix*, a film that functions as a synergy of cyberpunk literature, postmodern and digital media theory, and high-budget Hollywood entertainment. Within the film, viewers watch as the real-world Neo advances his avatar from the drone-like Tom Anderson to a digital superman whose black attire and martial arts proficiency specifically invoke Stephenson's protagonist. While the virtual Neo does not need to be programmed at the level of code by the real-world Neo, his functional characteristics within the Matrix are based entirely upon the databases to which the real-world Neo has access. Well before Neo famously declares that he 'knows kung fu,' a scene filled with narrational ellipses unfolds, with a database of different martial arts programs being uploaded directly into Neo's brain. The implication, when Neo proclaims his knowledge of Chinese martial arts, is that he now knows every style of kung fu,

from tai chi to drunken boxing. The multiple iterations that define kung fu as a database of differentiated forms are now wholly available to Neo as both the user of a digital system and the embodied avatar within. Such an extensive, expansive database is visualized for the film's viewer when Neo requests 'guns ... lots and lots of guns,' and is then plunged into a program that, besides a blank whiteness receding into infinity on all sides, features an unending gun rack that one can only assume contains every type of projectile weapon ever invented.

While *The Matrix* privileges the database as the core site of the avatar's structural development, James Cameron's recent *Avatar* foregrounds the individually specific nature of the interface itself as the element that makes each avatar uniquely divisible within the biomedia network the film diegetically constructs. Visually, the film's *mise-en-scène* is overloaded with interfaces. Almost every shot within the human outpost on the planet of Pandora features digital, tactile screens depicting everything from the biological interiors of the characters to planetary environs that exist for the running of military simulations. Importantly, the bio-digital interface between the humans' Na'vi avatars and their respective operators that these screens frequently depict is established as singular, each avatar being bound to the respective genetic code of its user. And, within the world of the Na'vi, singular genetic code interfaces are again established, as each Na'vi binds itself with only one of the pterodactyl-like creatures that allow for flight. In this way, the importance of a singular interface connection between the operator and their avatar is doubly declared as the core mechanic of avatar embodiment in the film's diegesis.

The avatar's appearance in cyberpunk literature and science fiction cinema constructs a useful analytic approach applicable to the contemporary field of videogame studies. The avatar in both the contemporary and classic videogame may be analyzed in terms of the technical complexities of the databases and interfaces that allow players to construct and develop their digital surrogates. Such an approach allows us to problematize and specify broad applications of the term avatar, which frequently denotes any piece of software over which the player has continued interactive control during gameplay. A multiplicity of avatar instantiations thus becomes apparent. This multiplicity is indebted to the technical capacities of the hardware and software through which individual games are developed and played, the genre of the games themselves, and the interests and goals of the player creating and playing through the avatar.

In MUDs popularized during the growth of digitally networked communication, classic single-player videogames and contemporary MMORPGs, the depth and complexity of the databases available to players, and the interfaces through which these databases are accessed, inherently inform the avatars the player can construct and control. The individual player's interests and desires further differentiate the modified avatar they construct within individual games, with the actions they perform in the virtual world implicating their individuality,

and the language they employ functioning as an act of self-expression. And yet, the actions performed and the language employed are inherently limited by the interfaces through which players access the databases provided them within these diverse virtual worlds. The limitations technology and design produce fundamentally structure the player's virtual functionality.

Conceiving the entwining databases and interfaces that allow for avatar construction as an analytic matrix, differentiated categories of avatars become apparent within videogame history. Single-edit avatars populate text-based MUDs where individual handles initially distinguish users. Minimally modifiable avatars are present in classic console games, such as the eponymous plumber of *Super Mario Bros. 3*.[10] In this game, a minimalist database is made available in the map screen existing between the linear individual levels. Between instances of directed play, players can apply 'magic mushrooms,' 'fire flowers,' 'frog suits' and the like to their avatar, simultaneously altering Mario's appearance, his functionality within the individual level, and the player's power relation to the game's enemies and obstacles. While the interface remains constant for all players, the attribute database changes depending upon each player's individual successes and failures. As such, the player's customization of Mario as an avatar is subject to both the tightly regimented rule structure of the game's design and the particularities of the individual player's gameplay experience.

In more recent games, highly customizable single-player avatars are evident. In *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* and *Skate 2*, the databases from which players can alter avatar aesthetics, modify individualized functionality, and vary power relations between the player and the game world have become increasingly complex.[11] Attire, physical features, and skill level in different forms of interaction, such as the effectiveness of a punch thrown in *GTA* or the turning radius of a skateboard in *Skate 2*, can be individually adjusted through a distinct avatar interface unique to each game. Such interfaces place avatar construction and modification at a remove from goal-oriented and exploratory play.

Finally, in networked MMORPGs such as *World of Warcraft*, deep individual customization of both attribute databases and the interface itself is possible. Players are able to manipulate the databases that foundationally structure their virtual surrogate onscreen, increasing the rapidity with which they can access certain preferred functions during gameplay. Databases of functional attributes thus become the interface through which the game is played, demonstrating a customization and modification potential unavailable in classic games.

Understanding avatars as existing at the nexus of the interface and the database allows comparisons to software that, while digital, are distinctly non-gamic. Software studies scholar Søren Pold breaks down the nexus of the interface and the database into 'preferences, settings, options, [and] control panels.'[12] Pold, analyzing the preference files of word processing programs, notes that the individual user can adjust such files to fit their own style of interaction. Preference

files, Pold argues, provide 'a peephole into ... the backstage area where the representation that is presented to the human user is produced,' and 'regulate three spheres around the software interface: functionality, power relations, and aesthetics.'[13] Pold continues,

> The software user as a character with certain rights, abilities, and limits is constructed [within the preference and setting selections]. This construction of the user has become more and more dynamic and cybernetic; the software automatically models itself on (its model of) the user. Software increasingly constructs dynamic models [and] stores traces of user behavior such as commonly used functions.[14]

Pold's consideration of modifiable preferences files is distinctly applicable to the avatar, a piece of software that functions within the larger program of the videogame. The databases of *The Matrix* and the singular interfaces of *Avatar*, intertwined in Stephenson's understanding of avatar construction in the Metaverse, and evident in both single-player games and networked MMORPGs, are themselves layered preferences that players must choose between or 'level up' to attain. Establishing the avatar's aesthetic appearance as well as its functionality within the virtual world may thus be understood as a form of preference selection, which determines the power relations between the individual player, the larger world, and the other avatars they encounter.

While the concept of the preference file exceeds the purview of the videogame, the collection of attributes and objects so as to populate avatar databases has seemingly become a game in and of itself. Espen Aarseth, writing on the ergodic time of videogames, discusses how game players are faced with *aporias*, obstacles or 'localized 'roadblocks' that must be overcome' during play, resulting in 'epiphanies ... essential to the exploration of the [game's] event space.'[15] The unpopulated characteristic and object databases of *World of Warcraft*, the unattained aesthetic attire and functional skills of avatars in *GTA* and *Skate 2*, and the empty power-up menu in *Super Mario 3*'s map all appear as *aporias*. Such empty databases necessitate goal-oriented play, collection and individualized adjustment to unlock the avatar's full potential within the game and tip the power relation between player and game in favor of the former.

In contemporary media culture, the avatar appears within multiple media forms. Much as cinema and literature that represent avatars have influenced this approach to understanding their construction within games, the avatar's increasingly complex incorporation of the player into the game world has also influenced how non-interactive media incorporate viewers. For example, when diegetically representing avatars, *The Matrix* and *Avatar* align the perspective of the audience with that of the avatar, using highly subjective shots to unite the vision of the

viewer with that of either *The Matrix*'s Neo or *Avatar*'s Jake Sully. In moments of self-realization, where these avatars' operators attain a command over the virtual world they have entered, visual perspective becomes distinctly first person. Such perspectives momentarily exceed the databases and interfaces that populate each respective narrative and instead emphasize scenes of visual spectacle witnessed by both the fictional avatar and the cinematic spectator simultaneously. Directly incorporating those outside the screen into digitally constructed virtual worlds, long the purview of games alone, now appears as a transmedia interest in avatar immersion.

Notes

[1] *The Matrix*, Digital Video Disc, Warner Brothers, Australia and the United States, 1999.
[2] A.R. Galloway, *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London, 2006, pp. 3 & 16.
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[6] Stephenson, pp. 35-36.
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[8] Ibid., p. 41.
[9] E. Apter, 'Technics of the Subject: The Avatar-Drive', *PostModern Culture*, Vol. 18, No. 2, January 2008, Available at http://pmc.iath.virginia.edu/text-only/issue.108/18.2apter.txt, Last accessed 28 May 2010.
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